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THE GREATNESS OF CHRIST

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

THE studies presented in this small book were originally given as talks to a group of students in the University where I serve. In order, however, to save my colleagues in the Faculty of Divinity from any embarrassment, I should at once add that the subject in which I lecture is not theology but geography; that is, my status is strictly amateur. It may well be, nevertheless, that a geographer's training, which is designed to encourage him to see things as a whole, has been of some assistance to me in attempting this survey of the broad outlines of the Bible narrative.

It may, in any case, be worth adding that the talks were not given in their present sequence, and that I had thought and talked about all the subjects here covered before I realised the connection between them; that is, before I saw what it was that they all had in common, and what was the truth to which they all pointed. Even so, I am conscious of the debt I owe to Christian friends who have supplied links and filled in gaps for me, as well as to those who, after the manuscript of the book was completed, have read it over and made suggestions which, I am sure, have saved me from my own misunderstandings.

The students themselves asked that the talks might be given more permanent form. This book is for them, but also for all others who may share its author's wish to exalt the One who Himself forms its central theme.

JOHN PATERSON.

St. Andrews,
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INTRODUCTION

THE heart of the whole Christian message is to be found in the greatness of Christ. Everything that is true for the Christian is true because, and only because, He is so great. We are drawn by the greatness of His redeeming love, freed by the greatness of His atoning sacrifice, and kept by the greatness of His saving power. The greatness of His triumph makes us more than conquerors here and now, and assures us of a living hope for the future, an inheritance reserved in heaven for us. Reconciliation with God; atonement for sin; the indwelling of the Spirit; the fellowship of the saints: all the great and glorious elements of the Christian faith have meaning only because, ultimately, they are secured by the limitless capacities of a great Christ, who is for us and in us.

Nor is this all. Not only does the greatness of Christ provide the foundation upon which our salvation is built, but it equally supplies God with the necessary ground upon which to erect His own eternal purpose. Vast as is the significance of Christ for us—for without Him we should never find God—His significance for His Father, and His contribution to the divine plan for the whole creation, far transcend it. What God seemed to have lost, He demonstrably regained; when God seemed to have been brought to a standstill, He made possible a new advance; where the very reputation of God seemed to be at stake in His creation, the greatness of Christ has provided for Him the amplest vindication.

But *how* great is Christ? There is no objective measure

of greatness. It can only be assessed by individual appreciation—by an estimate formed against the background of circumstances that called it forth, or by contrasting one man's achievements with those of others. And so we are brought to two propositions which are fundamental to all that follows in this book. Firstly, we can only properly assess the greatness of Christ when we understand the full measure of His achievement or, to be more exact, the dimensions of the appalling need which He has met. Our first task must therefore be to try to achieve this understanding—to analyse the situation into which He came, in order that we may see what was required of Him. To claim, as He did, to have finished the work which He had been given to do is truly impressive only when we see how immensely exacting, and how many-sided, that work had been.

Secondly, if the greatness of Christ is the focus of all Christian truth, then the *appreciation* of that greatness is the key to Christian progress. As Horatio Bonar expressed it:

'Tis what I know of Thee, my Lord and God,
That fills my soul with peace, my lips with song.

It is appreciation of the greatness of Christ that will inform our worship, encourage us in prayer, fortify us in service, and strengthen our resolve to run with patience the race that is set before us. For in whatever respect He is great, He is great *for me*.

The lives of Christians vary greatly in quality, from the calmly luminous to the wearily fruitless. A very brief analysis will show that the variable that accounts for these differences is not what we as Christians possess—for in Christ that is constant—but the extent to which we have *realised* what we possess in Him. Appreciation breeds devotion; devotion creates determination;

and without determination there can be no progress against the spiritual pressures and worldly frictions that impede the Christian's advance. An increasing estimate of the greatness of Christ is both the stimulus for, and at the same time the evidence of, our onward march.

CHAPTER I

THE NEED AND THE MAN

I glorified thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which thou hast given me to do.

(John 17. 4, R.V.)

THE coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to do the "work" of God represented the divine response to the work of His great enemy, the Devil. Satan had succeeded in introducing sin into a perfect creation, which God had declared to be "very good" (Genesis 1. 31). The entry of sin dealt a vicious blow at the twin principles upon which that creation was based. These two fundamental principles we may call authority and confidence.

Authority. The outstanding feature of the creation in its pristine perfection was its orderliness. Everything had its place, rank by rank, from the lowest forms of life to the highest, and at the zenith stood the man whom God had created in His own image. He was to have dominion over the rest (Genesis 1. 26, 28); to control the creation on behalf of the Creator. Thus there existed what is called in the army a "chain of command" between God and His creation: the creation under the authority of man, and man under the authority of God. Through the man, God could have His will done on the earth.

So basic was this principle of order and authority that the Bible seems to suggest that the origin of all the troubles that afflict us lay precisely here—in the effort made by some members of the heavenly hierarchy to *change* the divine order, an action which was tanta-

mount to rebellion against the authority of God (Isaiah 14. 12-15; Jude 6). But in the earliest days of the human story there was no hint of what was in store, when this disorder would disrupt the earthly hierarchy too.

Confidence. It is clear, however, that God did not create man merely to have a kind of bailiff in His world, but that He was also, by doing so, establishing a point of contact with it. In the Bible picture of a garden, in which God would come and look for man after the day's work was done (Genesis 3. 8), we can recognise the second principle on which the creation was based—that of a wonderful confidence existing between the Creator and the creature. This confidence, which sprang from the free and untroubled contact between them, was evidently sought by God as a part of His original design. As long as such a contact existed, God was not remote from His creation, but at home in it, sharing His life with the creature He had made in His own image.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN

All this was destroyed by sin. With the first act of man's disobedience, the "chain of command" was broken, and broken in both its links. Man by his action rejected the authority of God, whose rule he was supposed to maintain. In doing so, he subjected himself instead to the authority of God's enemy, the being who could now assume with self-assurance the title of prince of this world (John 12. 30). Furthermore, man's old, unchallenged "dominion" over the creation had gone. If he controlled it now—and that control was far from complete—it was only by the sweat of his face (Genesis 3. 19). With its thorns and thistles, its plagues and pests, Nature was hostile from now onwards.

The entrance of sin also destroyed the basis of mutual confidence between God and man. Not only did man's disobedience forewarn God that he was not to be trusted but also, unwarrantably as it proved but quite decisively, man's confidence in God suffered too. This becomes clear if we examine the nature of that first temptation to which man succumbed (Genesis 3. 1-6). We find that what happened was that they were deceived into believing that God had been unfair; that while He had given them a great deal, He had withheld from them the best thing of all. Apparently, therefore, He had not willed for them the most desirable will possible. They came to feel that they could do better for themselves than He was doing for them, and with that, their confidence in Him was shaken. By the subtlety of his attack, Satan had succeeded in undermining the mutual trust between God and man on both sides.

The results of this double breakdown, of authority and confidence, at once made themselves felt. For man they were obvious. In the first place, disobedience had led him into rebellion, and rebellion had cut him off from the tree of life (Genesis 2. 9, 16; 3. 22). He was condemned to death. In the second, he was banished from the presence of God, and that meant an end to the close contact between God and man on which their mutual confidence had depended.

The effect of this banishment has been dramatic. As long as he was admitted to the close fellowship of God, man could aspire to know his Creator, but once he was condemned to isolation, he was also condemned to ignorance. The angels with flaming swords at the gate of the garden (Genesis 3. 24) were to become a symbol not merely of separation but also of loss of communication. Man had now no means of knowing God.

What was true for that first man has become in-

creasingly apparent in his descendants, for as they drifted further afield from that original garden scene, they built up for themselves an increasingly distorted image of God, the Unknown. And every distortion that they imagined was sedulously encouraged and adorned by the enemy who had been responsible for the original deception. Men will believe the most astonishing perversions of the truth about God. Down the centuries He has had, to use a crude modern phrase, a terribly "bad press". Continually misrepresented as He has been, there has been no means of checking the distortion against the reality.

Let us notice, however, that this breakdown went one stage further. The loss of contact between God and man was followed by a loss of contact between men themselves. This becomes at once apparent when we notice the fact that the next story after what we call the Fall is that of Cain and Abel. Emphasised further by the events at Babel (Genesis 11), this loss of contact among men served as a tragic commentary upon the basic separation of God and man. Indeed, to the man in the street it is a far more real, and far more urgent, problem than that of contact with God. To reconcile nation with nation, and black with white, is a task that forces itself on his attention and appeals to his practical sense. But nothing has happened in history to suggest that there can be a brotherhood of man without the fatherhood of God. The breakdown was a single breakdown and the remedy, too, must be a single remedy.

THE FALL AND THE PURPOSES OF GOD

The effects of the Fall upon the status and prospects of man are well known; they provide the starting point for the Christian gospel of redemption. But alongside

them now appeared a second series of tragedies: the effects of the Fall upon the purpose of God. Because man is less directly affected by these—or rather, is unable by nature to see how he is affected—they have received much less attention than the first series; the loss was primarily God's, and the problem of recovery was His own. But we cannot for one moment accord them less prominence than the Fall's effects upon man, or fail to notice how they enormously enlarged the scope of the problem that had to be solved.

Firstly, then, man's disobedience left God without a representative in His creation upon whom He could rely to get His will done. In order to make sure that His purpose was fulfilled He would have to intervene personally in affairs, but this would, of course, nullify the whole point of creating a *man* to do His will for Him. And the breakdown in man, in any case, would remain unrepaired; God's intervention would provide no remedy for sin.

This lack of a reliable instrument to carry out God's will quickly became apparent in the history of His dealings with mankind. Again and again, He would inspire in a particular man a loyalty that seemed complete—but it never was. Whenever it seemed that at last God had found the perfect executive, the fatal weaknesses—disobedience, disloyalty, carelessness—would reappear, and the search had to begin again.

With the failure of man in his central role, the remainder of the creation was thrown out of gear. This creation, which had been designed to provide such impressive evidence of the wisdom and power of God, now presented, at best, an enigma. It was a creation that bore evidence of a marvellous order, yet an order which seemed aimless; a creation that raised questions in thoughtful men's minds, yet did not seem to point them conclusively to God for an answer. It had become

a creation which by its rhythm and texture suggests that God is (in Paul's words) "not far from every one of us", yet leaves the gulf unbridged (Acts 17. 27).

The other effect of the entrance of sin upon the purpose of God was that He was compelled to withdraw from the contact with man which He had intended to maintain. Henceforth, there was to be a distance between them. This in turn meant for God a twofold disappointment. In the first place, He had to forego the fellowship with man which He had evidently planned to enjoy. This relationship between Creator and creature had been, perhaps, the most remarkable feature of the original order, a paradox at the heart of the universe which had been an amazing testimonial to divine ingenuity. And in this fellowship, in some unfathomable way, God had found satisfaction. Indeed, to say that the loss of contact was a "disappointment" for God is to employ a term altogether too weak and too mundane for this situation. We form a truer estimate of the strength of this relationship as we read the words of the prophets, and find the Creator of the universe grieving over loss of contact with as stubborn and rebellious a people as ever divine love was lavished upon: "How shall I give thee up?" (Hosea 11. 8).

In the second place, God lost that foothold in His own world which His contact with man had provided. He was a stranger now in His own creation, an unhonoured and unrecognised visitor where once He had been known as the source of all authority and life. In this, His virtual dismissal from His universe, the ultimate magnitude of sin's consequences stood revealed.

THE NEED FOR A SOLUTION

The chaos thus created by Satan and sin could be remedied in two ways—by beginning again with a fresh

creation, or by repairing the damage to the old. Of the two solutions, however, the first was quite inadequate, for while the power of God was no doubt sufficient to do again what He had just done in creation, the stigma of the first breakdown and failure would nevertheless remain. To make a fresh start might mean that the new creation would break down as the old had done, so that the whole cycle of creation and failure might continue indefinitely. Alternatively, it might mean that, to safeguard against another breakdown, the Creator had to modify His original intentions, and be content with an inferior, safe substitute for His highest purpose in man. But this would be a negation of His whole design.

So the damage had to be repaired—the whole of it. But the inventory was a formidable one. We can draw it up, and as we do so we may form some impression of the need in which man now stood.

(1) He had been condemned to death. Therefore his first need was of some means of escaping from this sentence; a way of escape to life or, in the picture of Genesis 3, a way back to the tree of life.

(2) He had lost contact with God, and he needed to have that contact restored. Only so could he learn what God is like, and be able to distinguish the reality from the caricature so sedulously drawn for him by God's enemy. In that caricature there was little to attract man, but if the true image of God was to be revealed, a solution for the breakdown must first be found. Only then would death and ignorance give way to life, knowledge and renewed confidence.

(3) Humanity had been divided, and men needed a new basis of contact with each other. The lines of division had been driven deeply between them; somehow they must be brought together again, if they were not to drift into mutual destruction.

THE OPEN QUESTIONS

But this work of repair on behalf of man represented, if anything, the simpler half of the task. There was also God's situation to be considered, and what He required could be summed up in one word: vindication. As a result of what had happened, there now hung over His handiwork two great questions. The first was: Who is really in control of the creation? The chain of command which He had established had been broken, and He was being disobeyed. It would soon appear—and to the generality of mankind it appears to this day—as if He had lost control.

Nor can it be said that this impression is confined to the thoughtless kind of critic who, in the face of every fresh calamity or war, asks, "If God is really in control, why does He let this happen?" Precisely the same question occurred to Jeremiah: "Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee: yet would I reason the cause with thee: wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? wherefore are all they at ease that deal very treacherously?" (Jeremiah 12. 1, R.V.) Job and David, Jeremiah and Habakkuk; men who have held unswervingly to their basic assumption that God is just and fair, have also through the centuries been driven to admit themselves baffled by the appearance—by God's apparent reluctance to *exercise* the control which they were sure He possessed. Nowhere is this great "open question" more poignantly expressed than in the cry of those "that had been slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: and they cried with a great voice, saying, How long, O Master, the holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge . . .?" (Revelation 6. 9-10, R.V.) It is a question that requires an unequivocal answer.

So the urgent need of God was that His authority

should be vindicated; that it should be made clear that He could have, and was having, His will done. Of this there must be solid evidence, for authority, like justice, must not only be exercised, but be seen to be exercised. It is neither irreverent nor over-forceful to say that His reputation was at stake.

The second of these "open questions" complicated the issue. Let us for a moment recall the nature of the breakdown. When Satan attacked the first man and woman, he did not drag them off by force to become his servants; he "beguiled" them (Genesis 3. 13). What he did was to place before them a proposal that seemed more attractive than the one which God had offered them, and they chose it. Seen in this light, the incident raised the second great question: Who is really more attractive, God or Satan? Who has more to offer? Satan could claim that, in open competition, he won the allegiance of man by offering him a fairer prospect than God had offered.

Such a claim would assume, of course, that both offers were made by equally trustworthy persons; that each would fulfil what he had offered. But where one offer was made by God and the other by Satan, this was a perilous assumption to make, as Adam and Eve discovered to their cost. So this second great question, in the form in which we have just stated it, is incomplete. What is in question is not merely the attractiveness of the offer, but its genuineness: Who is more trustworthy, God or Satan?

These complications obviously ruled out a simple solution by force of the creation's dilemma. Let us suppose that, having lost the allegiance of man, God had reasserted His authority and simply brought the rebel to heel. Then we should have to assume that Satan would respond in this way: "Yes, He is more powerful than I am; I admit that, of course. But what does that

prove?" What indeed? What did it prove in Czechoslovakia in 1938 or Hungary in 1956? A solution by force would leave honours even: God more powerful, Satan more attractive. The situation would be intolerable.

If God was to be vindicated, He must show not only His power to command, but also His superior power to attract. People who ask why God does not simply end man's nonsense once and for all overlook this requirement of the situation. He could be vindicated only by letting it be seen that He could win men back; that after all He was more attractive, and at the same time more worthy of man's confidence, than His enemy. And this He must do without for one instant lowering His own perfect standards, or making an appeal to men on grounds unworthy of His character.

NEED OR LIMITATION?

To say that God had unfulfilled "needs", therefore, does not imply any shortage of His resources, or any impotence to deal with the situation. These needs were created by the fact that God could only act in ways which were worthy of Himself. With Him, any limitation was self-imposed. There could be no short cuts; He must act in keeping with, and in support of, His reputation—or, in the Bible's recurrent phrase, "for His great name's sake".

Let us, then, review these "needs". To vindicate Himself God required, firstly, the evidence provided by men whose confidence in Him had been restored; men living in contact with Himself, not from obligation but by choice. Secondly, and to heal that other breach which sin had torn open, He needed the evidence of men living *together* in harmony, without constraint; that is, evidence that the tragic process begun by Cain had been reversed.

There was one further condition, and that undoubtedly the most stringent of all. Since man had been the point of breakdown, man must also be the means of recovery. Only by a man or men could the damage be repaired. It would have been useless to seek a substitute—some angelic being, impervious to temptation and impregnable to assault. All that needed doing must be done by a man: the authority of God re-established, contact with Him restored, death defeated and life assured. Finally, it must be a man who, enjoying all this himself, could bring others to enjoy it too, and thus prove that he was not a freak or an exception, but the founder of a new and more loyal race.

For the sake of simplicity, we may express the sequence of thought up to this point in the form of a table, as follows:

<i>The Starting Point</i>	An orderly creation	Fellowship between God and man
<i>The Nature of the Breakdown</i>	Authority	Confidence
<i>The Result for Man</i>	Condemned to death	Contact with God lost; ignorance
<i>The Result for God</i>	No one to do His will	Fellowship with man lost
<i>The Open Questions</i>	Who is really in control?	Who is more attractive, more worthy of confidence?
<i>The Need for Man</i>	Escape to life	Renewed contact with God; knowledge
<i>The Need for God</i>	Authority and order visibly restored	Confidence and fellowship visibly restored, with man, and between men

Amidst the aftermath of sin and failure, Paul's question might well have echoed forlornly through a blighted creation: "Who is sufficient for these things?" The Christian gospel provides the answer. God found someone who was sufficient—a man who could do everything that was required of him; a man so great that, even when confronted by such a need, he proved himself well able to meet it, and to see God vindicated, man restored, and Satan overthrown. Jesus Christ provided the answer to a universe of need. And it will be well if, however familiar may be the story we have outlined, we can retain some sense of wonder at its *dénouement*: that, in order to ensure the complete fulfilment of this task, God undertook it Himself; that this man *was* God—God in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself.

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself in like manner took part of the same, that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them. . . .

(Hebrews 2. 14)

CHAPTER II

THE GREATNESS OF CHRIST—THE GOSPEL RECORD

THE greatness of Christ is demonstrated, in the Bible, in three main passages. The Gospels trace the record of His personal achievements. The Book of the Acts shows how He was able to bring others to share in His success. The Epistle to the Hebrews then provides a brief historical survey or review, in which Christ is contrasted with great people or institutions of the past, and is shown to be superior to them all. To these three, of course, might be added the Book of the Revelation, but as this is rather a visionary preview than a factual analysis, it will be best to omit it from the present discussion, for by the time we reach the Revelation, the greatness of Christ is demonstrated beyond dispute.

Between the Fall and the coming of Jesus, man's original mistakes had been repeated again and again; his initial disobedience had been confirmed in each generation, and his ignorance of God compounded. In this respect our Old Testament—which records, of course, the story of the only group who had *any* knowledge of God at all; the story, that is, of the spiritual intelligentsia of the ancient world—presents a depressing catalogue of failures. Confronted with similar temptations, demands or obstacles, it seemed that every human being would continue to fail, just as all his predecessors had done.

But Jesus was different. He was subject to the same laws, exposed to the same temptations, opposed by the

same pressures, yet He overcame them all. In the Gospels we see the man Jesus confronted with the obstacles before which the human race had fallen, and as a man overcoming them. Situation by situation, and problem by problem, He went back over the ground which had been lost, and showed that what man needed He had, and what God needed He could supply.

There is a danger that, as we look at the kaleidoscope of the Gospel record with its scores of separate stories, we may lose sight of this simple truth, that there was a pattern behind the seemingly fortuitous and unconnected events. To do the "work" which God had given Him, there was certain ground that Jesus had to cover, spiritually as well as geographically; certain enemies to meet, pressures to resist, forces to subdue.

JESUS AND THE NEED OF MAN

What was this spiritual ground that had to be regained? In the first instance, it was all that man had lost by the Fall. His immediate need was to escape from the condemnation of death under which the whole race lay. Since, however, this verdict had been provoked by sin and disobedience, it could only be revoked in the case of a man who could show that he had broken free from them, and could remain free throughout his life.

Such a person might then be in a position to supply the other great need of man: a restored contact with God. Freed at last from sin, he could enter once again into that close relationship which alone could produce the intimate knowledge of God intended for him from the beginning. Coming to know God in this way, he could then hope to understand, and enter into, God's purpose in creation, and so come to play his own destined role in that purpose.

So much we can construct by way of hypothesis.

The question is: Is this a true description of the life of Christ? Was He this man? The Gospels leave no doubt that He was; that He fulfilled all the conditions, and bore all the marks, to qualify Him (in the terms Paul was later to use) as the last Adam and the second man (I Corinthians 15. 45, 47).

Jesus Himself claimed, in the first place, to live in perfect obedience to God (John 8. 29), and He challenged His critics—without any evident response—to find fault with Him (John 8. 46). During His public ministry, there came voices from heaven to support His claim (Mark 1. 11; 9. 7). But it was, of course, the resurrection which provided the clinching evidence. Whatever He might claim, nothing else counted unless a man could escape from the condemnation of death—and He did. In Him death met its match. "It was not possible that he should be holden of it" (Acts 2. 24).

If the other great need of man was contact with God, the claims of Jesus on this score were equally emphatic: that He knew God; that He was familiar with "heavenly things"; that His knowledge of God's will was so perfect as to guide His every action—and none of these things were true of His religious critics. He made this point in His conversation with Nicodemus (John 3. 10-13), and it is a recurrent theme in the other discussions which John subsequently recorded. (Cf. John 5. 20-27; 7. 28-29; 8. 19, 29, 38, 55; 10. 15, etc.)

The evidence supporting this claim was of two kinds. On the one hand, there was the evidence of His "works"—the actions which resulted from His knowledge of God's will. He pointed to these as supporting His claims, and challenged His critics to find fault—to show in what way, if any, His works were evil, and so might be produced (as some of them said) by a devil. He argued—and so did many of His hearers (John 3. 2; 7. 31; 9. 30-33)—that such works as His could only be

carried out by someone in the closest possible touch with God.

On the other hand, there was the evidence which came from outside—the signs and voices from heaven. These served the purpose of providing, as any thoughtful observer of Jesus would require, some objective test of His claim to be in contact with God and sent by Him. There was the scene on the Mount of Transfiguration; there was the challenging drama at the tomb of Lazarus (“... because of the people which stand by I said it . . .”), and there was the voice from heaven mentioned in John 12. 28, of which Jesus said, “This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes.” It was not He who doubted His contact with heaven, but they. Here, then, was a man to whose prayer heaven reacted, and one whose teaching repeatedly struck the outsider as authoritative, as if He was genuinely familiar with the heavenly realities of which He spoke.

To make good the lost ground of the human race this would have been enough, but Jesus claimed much more than the mere fact that He knew God well; He claimed to be the Son of God. Possessing this unique and divine relationship, He had come from God to “make him known” (John 1. 18, R.S.V.). He had come, in fact, to correct all the false impressions of God which Satan, profiting by man’s ignorance and remoteness, had diligently built into the thoughts of a hundred generations of the human race. His knowledge of the reality was complete, because He *was* God, the one person uniquely qualified to give human form to that mysterious, divine character.

At this point we must, of course, persist with our enquiry, and ask whether Jesus succeeded in His task of revealing God. Was His portrayal true, complete and balanced? But this important question is best deferred until the next chapter, for the answer to it is more easily

judged, not by the life of Jesus Himself, but by those of His followers—by the extent to which *they* revealed that they had clearly understood what God is like.

JESUS AND THE INTERESTS OF GOD

For man in his need, Jesus did all that was required, and more. But if we stop there in assessing the greatness of the life of Christ we shall lose, in a Shakespearian phrase, “best half of our affair”. We must never lose sight of God’s own interest in the activities of His Son. It could probably be argued, in fact—although there is no reason for doing so—that if Jesus Christ had come only to meet the need of man, then much that He did and underwent during His ministry was superfluous. This is especially true of His miracles, which it has become fashionable to discard for precisely that reason—that they form quite unnecessary obstacles to acceptance of the gospel by intelligent people. While they may (so the argument runs) have deluded or impressed the ignorant rustics of first-century Palestine, they cannot be expected to find credence today; indeed, we are better off without them, for they merely cloud the real issues. But let us examine the wisdom of such a course, by trying to see what purpose these “superfluous” activities of Jesus were intended to serve.

God’s first requirement was that His authority should be reasserted, firstly *over* man, and then, *through* man, over the creation. From Adam to Christ there had been no single man—not even Abraham or David—whose whole life, in this respect, had unequivocally vindicated the wisdom of God in His world. Sooner or later, in the career of each servant of God, there always came a breakdown in his obedience to his Master.

The tone of Jesus’ life, by contrast, was set by the phrases, “I came down from heaven, not to do my own

will, but the will of him that sent me" (John 6. 38), and "The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do" (John 5. 19). Presented with splendid opportunities of imposing His own will on situations, and attracting to Himself a great personal following, He threw them away with a freedom from self-interest that baffled friend and critic alike. And when He came to the end of His public ministry, and made His last appeal to His listeners amidst a mounting tension which John makes us feel as we read his account, it was to this theme of subjection to the Father's will that He returned: "Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on me believeth not on me, but on him that sent me . . . For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak" (John 12. 44, 49). In the Lord Jesus Christ, God at last found an entirely reliable instrument of His will. Here indeed was "a man under authority".

In God's original chain of command, however, man was to exercise authority as well as submit to it. This he had signally failed to do. Except when God intervened directly on his behalf, sending him a Joseph or a Moses or an Elijah, he was the victim of Nature, not its master. He starved in years of famine, and died of thirst in the desert. He feared the thunder and the hailstones, and suffered the ravages of disease and the attacks of locusts. The fact that Moses, for example, could control these natural forces on occasions merely threw into stronger relief man's helplessness; evidently it *was* possible to assert oneself, if only one knew how.

THE MIRACLES OF JESUS

By His miracles, Jesus provided the evidence of control over the creation which was essential if God

was to be vindicated. He possessed the "dominion" which Adam had lost. This man was seen to have power over the whole range of natural forces—the wind, the storm, the life of trees and animals—as well as over bread and water (that is, over hunger and thirst), wine and money, miracle after miracle lengthening the list. More than that, He could control forces that had never been included in Adam's domain, for they were products of the Fall—sickness, evil spirits and, ultimately, sin and death themselves.

Each of the miracles of Jesus marked the assertion of His authority over another element of disorder in the creation—or, from man's point of view, another element of defeat. It is not surprising that the question of authority quickly became the central issue in the debate surrounding Him: "By what authority doest thou these things, and who gave thee this authority?" (Matthew 21. 23). The Jews, denied the modern luxury of being able to dismiss the miracles as fairy tales, and forced to recognise that authority of some sort was being displayed, concentrated their attack on its *source*: "By *what* authority?" They were reduced to arguing that His powers were derived from "the prince of devils", an explanation so lame that Jesus dismissed it by merely pointing out that it was illogical.

He Himself was equally emphatic on this issue of His authority; His miracles were to provide evidence that He was authorised by God: "... that ye may know that the Son of man hath authority on earth to forgive sins" (Mark 2. 10, R.V. margin). *Authority on earth*: that had been God's pressing need ever since the beginning of man's sin. And now even Jesus' enemies were faced with the realisation that God's authority had been revealed: "If it is by the finger of God that I drive out the devils, then be sure the *kingdom of God* has already come upon you" (Luke 11. 20, N.E.B.).

Yet this need was God's, and not man's, as the Gospel record makes clear with scrupulous care. There was to be no question of man using his authority merely to show off, or to perform miracles in his own interest. In Luke 9 and 10, Jesus sent out groups of His disciples "and gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases" (Luke 9. 1); that is, He invested them with the same authority as He had. "And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name" (Luke 10. 17).

The reaction of Jesus to this quite natural excitement was highly significant. What He said was, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven." This may sound to us over-dramatic, but it was an exact description of the effect He had come to produce—the reassertion of God's authority. Once that was done, the era of Satan's unchallenged control over man had indeed ended. But then He immediately added a word of caution: "Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10. 20). For men to escape the condemnation of death, to be reconciled to God and assured of a place in heaven—here, indeed, was fit cause for them to rejoice. But the reassertion of authority over Satan's forces was not for man but for God. It bore directly, not upon the needs of men, but upon the needs of God. They needed access to heaven; He needed vindicated authority. To reflect on their recent triumphs in exercising His power could only mislead them (which, as Luke 9. 46-56 shows, was precisely what it had done). "In this rejoice not" therefore; this is God's share.

The miracles of Jesus impressed His contemporaries, while their effect on today's sceptics is only to make them more sceptical. Yet they were performed, in the

last analysis, for neither of these audiences but for a third; an audience less easily impressed than the one, yet also less sceptical than the other (for the devils also believe); an audience, largely invisible, of spiritually perceptive beings who knew how the accounts stood and what were the issues at stake. For Jesus not to have performed these miracles; for us now to reject them as unacceptable to the educated mind; or for us to treat them—as has become so fashionable nowadays—merely as symbols of the actions of God towards men, so that it does not matter whether or not they actually *happened*—all these alternatives would alike be tantamount to leaving some part of the work of Satan intact. And “to this end was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil” (I John 3. 8).

CONFIDENCE RESTORED

There remained, however, another element of the situation to be dealt with—God’s need for a visible restoration of contact and fellowship between Himself and man. This fellowship, with the sense of mutual trust which it engendered, had been destroyed by sin, as we have seen. The results of this estrangement are very clearly evident in the history of the Children of Israel. Although they had every opportunity to form a favourable impression of the God who had delivered them from Egypt, they “intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more: for they could not endure that which was commanded . . .” (Hebrews 12. 19–20). All too seldom did they give the impression of being chosen people, living on terms of joyful trust with their God. Rather the reverse, for when God led them on from Sinai into their desert wanderings, intending to use the wilderness as their training ground, they managed to give the impression that it was not they who

were on trial, but He: “. . . your fathers tested me, and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work” (Psalm 95. 9, R.S.V.). Their conclusion from this test is known to us all: not even deliverance from Egypt and months of miraculous care in the desert could convince them that He was trustworthy. They decided that they did not have sufficient confidence in Him to enter His land of rest (Numbers 13. 27-33; Hebrews 3. 19).

After this, their subsequent history need cause us no surprise, with their ignorance of God's law, their carelessness regarding worship, and their constant search for outside allies in whom they could blindly repose the confidence which they did not feel in their God. And He, on His side, had done so much for them and committed Himself so fully to them that when, in the messages of the prophets, we read His grieved reproaches, it is the image of the unfaithful wife which is most commonly used—an image of confidence reposed and betrayed.

Jesus came to express, by His life and attitude, a restored confidence. He came to reveal a God with whom it was possible—contrary to any impression an Old Testament people might have formed—to enjoy a relationship of rest and fellowship. It is against this Old Testament background that we must assess the impact of Jesus' words, “Come unto me . . . and I will give you *rest*” (Matthew 11. 28). Rest—the rest of obedience, submission and faith (Psalm 37. 7; Hebrews 4. 10)—was the last quality which the desert wanderers of the Old Testament associated with their God; yet now Jesus was offering it to all the weary.

The best evidence of this new relationship was to be seen in His own life. He claimed the closest possible relationship with God; yet He was so manifestly at rest in it. It was characterised by mutual understanding and trust: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well

pleased" (Matthew 3. 17); "I do always those things that please him" (John 8. 29). The voices from heaven at Jesus' baptism and at the Transfiguration were no less real than the voice at Sinai, which had made even Moses "exceedingly fear and quake" (Hebrews 12. 21), but they left Him calm and assured—had any assurance been necessary—that His relationship with God was secure.

JESUS AND THE OPEN QUESTIONS

On one occasion, not long before His death and resurrection, Jesus summarised, in a single sentence, all that He had come to do in relation to the great double issue of authority and confidence with which our story began. In a few words, He gave His answers to the two "open questions" which arise out of it: Who is really in control? and, Who is really the more attractive and trustworthy? He said, "Now is the judgement of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out, and I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself" (John 12. 31-32, R.V.). The prince of this world cast out: here was the question of authority. All men drawn to Himself: this was the question of attraction. Satan attracted men away from God by the argument of self-interest. With a gesture which has always appeared utterly incomprehensible to the rational mind (I Corinthians 1. 23), God committed Himself to the great counter-attraction of the Cross, the supreme expression of His goodwill. "This he said, signifying by what manner of death he should die" (John 12. 33, R.V.).

THE MISSING FACTOR

What remained to be done? Had the work of Christ been sufficient? Was the evidence complete? He Him-

self died in the assurance that His work was finished. But if this analysis is correct, a very important fact emerges. While the *work* was complete, the *evidence* was not.

As we have seen, the situation demanded not merely that the work should be done, but that it should be *seen* to be done. The evidence must correspond to the spiritual reality. And while we have traced the work of Christ, and the evidence He Himself provided, in relation to each of the needs of God and man, one point still remains: contact between God and man had been restored, but what of the deep divisions that separated men from each other?

The work of Christ was indeed complete. In no single respect did anything require to be added to it; here, for all time, reposes the central truth of the gospel. The Cross made possible the removal of all the barriers between men. This triumph over centuries of mistrust Paul describes majestically in Ephesians: "He is our peace, who hath . . . broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his flesh the enmity." By the Cross the work was done; but where was the evidence to which Paul could point?

The Lord Jesus did the work; He could not, in His single self, provide the evidence, for that demanded the collaboration of others. Ultimately, the evidence that all the "middle walls of partition" had been broken down would have to be borne by those for whom He had set an example. He had provided the means; His followers must provide the evidence.

This conclusion seems inescapable. But if it is, then we must notice its practical effect on our reading of this story, as we turn now from the Gospel record of Jesus' triumphant death and resurrection to its sequel—the Acts of the Apostles. It means that, as the thoughtful reader turns from one to the other, following the logic of

the situation rather than his own previous knowledge of the narrative, he has one vital question to ask of the new Church that came into being at Pentecost: Are they together? Does the life of Jesus' followers and successors provide the evidence which is logically required—evidence of renewed contact between man and man? For a moment we suspend judgement as we turn this all-important corner in the history of the race.

It is most striking to read the last instructions of the Lord to His disciples and to find that, all processes of logic apart, His own emphasis in those final hours was precisely on this point. As He spoke, and as He prayed for them, His over-riding concern for them was that they might be one. Perhaps, therefore, by taking the route which we have followed to arrive at this point, we can now more readily appreciate the inwardness of His words as He said, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another . . . By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13. 34-35). We may now more fully understand why He prayed, "that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17. 21). Amidst all our yearnings for Church unity, perhaps we lack conviction because we lack real comprehension of the context of these words.

CHAPTER III

THE GREATNESS OF CHRIST—THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them;
that they may be one, even as we are one.

(John 17. 22)

THE Cross stands at the centre of all the work of Christ. By it, He registered His personal victory over the enemy of God; through death, He destroyed him who had the power of death (Hebrews 2. 14). By the Cross, also, He made available to other men what He had secured. From it, there sprang a new creation, the world of a new man, whose head is Christ and whose body is His people.

It is, as we have already foreseen, in the Acts of the Apostles that we must look for the evidence of this transition from the single prototype of the new man—Christ Himself—to a whole new race of men. The victory of Jesus was not just a historic freak, as one prisoner might escape from confinement, leaving his fellow-captives behind to face increased security precautions on the part of their gaoler. His defeat of Satan was comprehensive, providing a way to freedom for others. The evidence of this is found in the life of His Church.

Jesus Himself, during His ministry, was obviously looking ahead to the time when He would leave His disciples and bequeath to them His task, and He often referred, in both His teaching and His promises, to this time when He would hand over the work to them. We

see Him, for example, explaining to His followers that they were invited to share His own confident and close relationship with God; encouraging them to think of God not as the remote deity of Sinai, but as their heavenly Father. To a Jew such ideas must have been, to say the least, novel and we are not surprised to find the disciples groping their way into this new spiritual sphere, finding it hard to believe that God actually wanted them to enter. Jesus sought to prepare their hearts and minds for the relationship which the Cross was to make a reality.

His promises, too, bore upon this same transition, for He assured them during His last hours with them that all the needs of God and man would in future be met *through them*. Because of the death that He was about to die and the departure He would then take, all that had been true of Himself would henceforth be true of them. There was man's need to escape the condemnation of death, and His promise, "Because I live, ye shall live also" (John 14. 19). There was the problem of man's ignorance of God, the result of estrangement, and Jesus' assurance, "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you" (John 15. 15). Then, too, there was God's long search for a man who would express His authority, as Jesus had done, and the Lord's parting promise, "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father" (John 14. 12). And there was God's desire for renewed fellowship with man, of which Jesus spoke so clearly: "If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (John 14. 23).

THE WORK OF JESUS UNDER TEST

Would these promises be fulfilled in the young Church which He left behind? The first test was not long delayed. Sin had brought condemnation and death, and these in turn brought with them fear; men were "through fear of death . . . all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Hebrews 2. 14). The early Church, by contrast, was conspicuously free from fear. When it was threatened, its response was, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye" (Acts 4. 19). When its leaders were punished for persisting in their stand, they "departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name" (Acts 5. 41). Then came the acid test—the martyrdom of Stephen. How would the first martyr of the Church face this supreme moment? "He, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God . . . And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep" (Acts 7. 55, 60). We shall not, surely, be imagining too much if we visualise the small, awestruck group of Christians sharing one common thought: "It works!" Jesus had promised that it would: "Because I live, ye shall live also."

But in a longer perspective than that provided by the period from the resurrection to the death of Stephen, that first test has been faced and passed again and again, for it is surely true that the supreme challenge offered to the world by the Church has been this same indestructible, fear-free life. So often its opponents have been forced to the conclusion that its life does not depend on material props—for it has had none—and

that it does not succumb to fear and threats. It lives because He lives.

THE TEST OF KNOWING GOD

There were, however, other tests in store. If men in general lacked contact with God, and were ignorant of Him, what of these men? From Pentecost onwards, they were different. The keynote was struck on the first morning of the Church's life, when Peter announced, "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days . . ." (Acts 2. 16-17). "This is that"; Jesus in His teaching employed a spiritual time-fuse which was set for Pentecost (the phrase is Andrew Glendinning's), and now the fuse had detonated. With that spiritual detonation came a new knowledge of God. From now on, the apostles impressed their hearers, just as Jesus had done, by their understanding—"Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled" (Acts 4. 13). From now on, the tables were turned; it was the religious Jews who were the ignorant and the apostles who were the informed: "And now, brethren; I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers" (Acts 3. 17). If any more pointed commentary were needed on this sharp reversal, we have it in the career of the man from Tarsus, that Hebrew of the Hebrews: "I was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: howbeit I obtained mercy, because I did it *ignorantly* in unbelief" (I Timothy 1. 13, R.V.).

So immediate was the impact of this new-found knowledge that it required only one sermon by Peter to bring to the disciples a throng of Jews asking, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2. 37). Twenty-four

hours earlier, no one would have dreamt of asking a Galilean fisherman what to do about his soul's welfare—and in Jerusalem of all places, where the experts in religion were assembled for the feast. Now the fisherman and his colleagues were suddenly in demand. "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me . . ." (Acts 1. 8).

THE TEST OF AUTHORITY

For the needs of man, then, the early Church had an answer. We must now examine the requirements of God, and test the young Church by the criterion of His needs. To settle the question of authority, the followers of Jesus must show the same double response to authority as He did—obedience to God, and control in His world.

The issue of obedience they confronted immediately: "We ought to obey God rather than men . . . We are witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that *obey* him" (Acts 5. 29-32). We need not, however, assume that obedience came easily to them. They were moving slowly forward into a new spiritual world, in which everything was happening to them for the very first time, and in this world the commands of God must often have seemed strangely at variance with their previous experience. What, for example, was Peter to make of a command to kill and eat unclean creatures? (Acts 10. 13). His first reaction is faithfully recorded for us: "Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." What were these men to make, too, of the idea that circumcision, about which God had been so particular in the days of Abraham and Moses, no longer mattered? But however bewildered

they may have been, they recognised that obedience was the central issue in their progress. "We ought to obey God", and ultimately everything else was subordinated to that fact.

They obeyed God, and they exercised authority—the same authority that Jesus had. Inside a Church which had included Ananias and Sapphira among its members, there was no need to argue this fact. But there was plenty of evidence for the outsider too. Crowds of sick people came to the apostles, and "were healed every one" (Acts 5. 16). Some of these cures were especially impressive, since they were carried out at a distance—by handkerchiefs, for example, carried from Paul to the sick person or, apparently, by the shadow of Peter falling on the invalid (Acts 19. 12; 5. 15). Evil spirits were cast out, as they had been by Jesus, and when others tried to copy the apostles they met with disaster (Acts 19. 13-17). The dead were raised and the prison gates opened to the prayers of the Church. "Greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father."

THE TEST OF RELATIONSHIP

This young Church also showed that it enjoyed a new relationship with God. It was a restored fellowship which gave the Christians the same calm confidence in God that Jesus had shown, rather than the old feeling of Israel at Sinai—that the further away from Him they were, the better. This confidence was all the more remarkable, since the Church had been shaken at so early a stage in its life by the death of Ananias and Sapphira. Obviously, it was fatal to presume upon this relationship with God; the demands of His holiness had not been withdrawn. Yet the Church continued to speak about "good tidings" and "times of refreshing", and the

fulfilment of God's promises. The Church of the Acts was a happy Church, confident in God and trusting Him through the darkest times. These men may not always have understood God's way, but they never doubted His utter reliability.

The contrast between this new outlook and that of the Jews, tradition-bound and only vaguely hopeful, is well brought out in Paul's sermon in the synagogue at Antioch, which is recorded in Acts 13. Here, Paul was speaking to a group of Jews who were worshipping on in the tradition of centuries, without sense of fulfilment, and encouraged only by the hope that one day God might make good His promises. To this audience, Paul brought a message of relief. He said, "We declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children." The barrier of sin had been broken down, and a new relationship had been established: "By him [Jesus] all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts 13. 32-33, 39). Here at last was a message to meet their needs, a message of contact restored with a God who kept His promises.

THE TEST OF A LIFE TOGETHER

There remained one other test for the followers of Jesus and, as we have seen, it was a vital one. It might be called the test of the missing evidence, or the test of a life together. The situation demanded that the Church should show a way of life which would reverse the trend of human discord that had begun with Cain and Abel. Jesus had left it to His Church to display this life together, and unless it did so there would be no evidence that the old divisions between men had been healed. A very great deal depended, then, on this quality of its life.

With the wisdom of hindsight and the New Testament in our hands, we may well feel that this was one test which the Church passed with distinction and, indeed, with ease. The scenes described in the early chapters of Acts seem exactly to fit the needs of the situation. We find that "all that believed were together, and had all things common" (Acts 2. 44). In their joy at being together, they were "of one heart and one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own" (Acts 4. 32); they ate together, apparently without even worrying about whose house they were in, and no one went short. It is a wonderful picture of a life of fellowship.

Yet this may mislead us. Undoubtedly, the really interesting observation in the Book of the Acts is to see not how well they succeeded, but how nearly they failed—and what would have been lost if they had. On at least four occasions, the future of this life together hung by a thread. The first of these was when Peter had his vision at Joppa (Acts 10); the second was when he reported in Jerusalem on his visit to Cornelius the Gentile (Acts 11); the third was when a delegation from Judea arrived in Antioch, and the problem was carried to Jerusalem for discussion (Acts 15); the fourth is related in Galatians 2, and happened when Peter came to Antioch and Paul opposed him.

On each occasion, the stumbling-block was the same—the failure of the Jewish Christians to grasp that the Cross had indeed "broken down the middle wall of partition" between the Gentiles and themselves. Satan, who had spent some thousands of years persuading men that God did not really love people, but only some of them who were His favourites, was making a great attempt to have his lie built into the very structure and constitution of the Church. If he had succeeded, the Church would have been useless in the very role for

which God had cast it—the role on which all else depended.

Jesus came, as we saw in Chapter II, to make the true character of God known. Did He succeed? Did His followers show that they had grasped the reality of God as it stood out in Jesus' life, in stark contrast to the common misconceptions about Him? Here, we may say, was the acid test. If Satan could persuade the leaders of the Church that the Cross had simply brought into being a Jewish Church, preaching a Jewish gospel, then it would be quite obvious that Jesus' followers had utterly missed the point, and that Jesus had failed in His mission to "make him known".

We should do well to read again the familiar story of Acts, and let the imminence of this catastrophe really impress us. We might then pause to remember with gratitude the man who, under God, saved the situation. For this, we can never over-estimate the debt that we owe to Paul—a debt which, even if he had never written a single epistle or carried the gospel to Europe, would still ensure him the highest honour among God's people. It was to his spiritual perception, as against both the pressure from his fellow-Christians and the inclinations stemming from his own background, that we owe the fact that, when he saw Peter taking his meals with a Jewish group of Christians he said, in effect, "This is quite vital. If we let Peter do this, we are lost" (Cf. Galatians 2. 11-14). For the sake of this principle, and over such a matter—trivial as it must have appeared—he would oppose even Peter himself. For this principle he fought in Galatia, at Antioch, at Colosse, and at Jerusalem itself. If it still mattered to what race of mankind a Christian belonged; if being a Jew still gave a man status above that of the Gentiles, then, argued Paul, "Christ is become of no effect" (Galatians 5. 4).

And for all that Peter failed so badly that day at Antioch, we cannot forget that he himself had also met, and bowed to, this situation. With all his prejudices exploded, and his expectations overturned, he had accepted the *fait accompli* of Caesarea: "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation, he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts 10. 34-35).

What had gone wrong? How was it that Satan so nearly succeeded, at the last possible moment, in destroying the evidence of his own defeat? The answer is surely that, even now, the apostles were underestimating the greatness of Christ. He might have lived a unique life; He might have risen from the dead; He might have sent them the Holy Spirit; but to bring together Jew and Gentile in a common fellowship through the Cross—that, surely, was beyond belief. Not even He could do that!

Only gradually did the full truth dawn upon them: that Christ is so great that in Him there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free; but He is all, and in all.

CHAPTER IV

THE GREATNESS OF CHRIST—THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

THE studies in the Gospels and the Book of the Acts in our last two chapters have been attempts to show the greatness of Christ by relating His coming, as God and man, to the situation of the human race. They have sought to prove His greatness by His achievements. But were these achievements, as Christians claim, really unique? Given the same conjunction of circumstances, could they not have been carried out by someone who made a less extravagant claim for himself than that of being the Son of God? This thought, or something very like it, must have been in the minds of many people after Jesus' departure, and in the minds of His Jewish compatriots especially. Was He not the carpenter of Nazareth's son?

During the long period between the breakdown of the first man and the coming of Jesus, such limited contacts as had been possible between God and men were almost all made with one particular group, the Children of Israel. Occasionally, the long record of failure was interrupted by the shining obedience of an Abraham or a Moses; by the calm confidence in God of Caleb on the borders of Canaan, of David going out to meet Goliath. In so far as God had revealed Himself to man, it was to this group that He had done so. To them were entrusted the oracles of God; theirs was the adoption, the glory, the covenants and the promises (Romans 3. 2; 9. 4). Of all this the Jewish people were conscious, and

understandably proud. In their spiritual history, the quality of greatness was not lacking.

Yet the greatness of Christ is nowhere seen in more dramatic perspective than in the contrast between Himself and the best that Israel knew. It is this contrast that the Epistle to the Hebrews presents, in the form of a historical review. Indeed, the epistle seems to have been written for this very purpose: on the one hand to demonstrate the greatness of Christ and, on the other, to point out to Jewish believers that, with so great a Christ, they had no excuse for failing in the Christian life. This double emphasis is well expressed in a single sentence of the epistle: "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" It is on the *greatness* that the argument is based.

To appreciate the perspective offered by the epistle, it is very important to grasp its structure. Whoever wrote it has produced a masterpiece of both history and logic. Its primary division is into two sorts of passage, corresponding to the double emphasis already mentioned. These we may call simply *argument* and *application*. It is a fairly easy task to go through the book and divide its contents into these two types of passages. The argument can then be read straight through, in sequence, and each of the application passages relates, naturally, to the section of the argument which it follows.

THE ARGUMENT

The group of Christians to whom the epistle was written had been brought up to admire and respect their religious inheritance. The writer, however, sets out with the avowed intention of showing them that what they revere cannot stand comparison with the greatness of Christ. He is greater than their national

heroes, and better able to bring them to God than the institutions of priests and sacrifices which they treasure from their past. Actually, the writer adds, these things served as parables or allegories whose reality, did they but realise it, is to be found in Christ.

This last argument has led some Bible students to the rather careless assumption that the whole epistle is allegorical, and therefore unworthy of equal status with the other epistles in the canon. Nothing could be more misleading. The epistle is an argument, with people who were in deadly earnest, about which real basis of approach to God was better—theirs or the writer's.

The technique which this anonymous writer uses is to compare the Lord Jesus with a series of figures and institutions—angels, Adam, Moses, Joshua: Aaron and the Aaronic priesthood; the old covenant with its ordinances (which centred on the Tabernacle), and the Old Testament offerings. In each case, he first concedes a similarity between Christ and the Old Testament counterpart, and then goes on to show that there was in the historic original some weakness, either moral or circumstantial—a weakness not shared by Christ.

This is not the place to develop the argument in full, but a sample or two will indicate the method. Between Christ and Moses, the writer argues, there was a certain similarity (Hebrews 3. 2). If, as he has just been claiming, Christ is the one who delivers from bondage and makes reconciliation for the sins of the people (Hebrews 2. 15, 17), then it is also true that Moses did the same; he delivered Israel from the bondage of Egypt, and not once but on several occasions (cf. Exodus 32, etc.) averted God's judgement on Israel by his personal intervention. So far, a Jew might quite reverently feel, honours were even.

But the career of Moses, while it contained such spectacular achievements as the building of the Taber-

nacle and the march through the wilderness, was marred by serious failures. The writer turns first to the building of the Tabernacle.

In this former House of God, Moses was a servant (Hebrews 3. 5); he built it by simply carrying out orders from God which were detailed to the last degree, and which left him no room for personal initiative. This duty he faithfully performed. But then one day, as the servant of God, he disobeyed God's orders (Numbers 20, 7-12), and as a result he suffered the fate that any disobedient servant might expect—he was dismissed.

"But Christ as a son, over his house . . ." (Hebrews 3. 6, R.V.): here is the contrast. Not now a servant, to obey or be dismissed, but a Son in God's house—and no one can "dismiss" Him. As a matter of fact, there was never any question of His dismissal, for in Him there was never any disobedience. "Son though he was, he learned obedience in the school of suffering" (Hebrews 5. 8, N.E.B.). Christ is greater than Moses.

The other point in Moses' career that the writer touches upon is his leadership of the people in the wilderness, on their way to the Promised Land. Here the weakness in Moses' story is too apparent to need stressing: neither he nor they ever reached that land of rest. And in the event, not even Moses' successor Joshua gave the people rest either, land or no land. (Cf. Hebrews 4. 8.) But there remains a rest for the people of God, and it is Christ who brings them into it:

The rest of ceasing from myself,
To find my all in Thee.

No one need fear for Moses' reputation. When the writer comes to list his Men of Faith in Hebrews 11, Moses is there, and none stands higher in that honour roll than he. But in a direct comparison with Jesus

Christ and His greatness, he is bound to come off second-best.

The same is true of Aaron. There is again the resemblance (Hebrews 5. 4-5) and again the weakness inherent in the Old Testament example. For one thing (Hebrews 7. 26-28), the Aaronic priests themselves were not blameless; their contact with God, which was the whole purpose of their existence, could only be ensured by their bringing offerings for their own sins. For another thing, their services were limited to their lifetime; when a priest died, his service ended, and there was an interval before another priest took up his duties. By contrast, Christ is "holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners", and He "lives in the power of an endless life" (Hebrews 7. 26, 16).

The argument, however, does not stop there, for the Jews with whom the writer is debating can object, with perfect reason, that this weakness in the Old Testament priesthood was not fatal. Contact with God, they can argue, depends not so much on the priest or intermediary as on the *basis* on which God lets Himself be approached—that is, on the covenant in force. The writer evidently anticipates such an argument, for from the priesthood he turns next to this subject.

The old covenant was symbolised by the Tabernacle—by its layout and its rules of entry, the ordinances. Every phase of these was precisely controlled, and in these ordinances God was providing a parable (Hebrews 9. 9) of the way of approach for His people to Himself.

The trouble with this way was simply that it was so narrow that only one man, once a year, was allowed to use it. For the rest of mankind, there could be no question of personal contact with God or, consequently, of getting to know Him. Furthermore, when the High Priest did penetrate into the Holy of Holies, his business there was clear; he was to make atonement for the sins

of the people over the past year (Exodus 30. 10; Leviticus 16). He reached the presence of God only to recall past sins.

Christ is the mediator of a better covenant (Hebrews 8. 6). It is better because the "way into the Holiest" has been renewed and opened to all (Hebrews 10. 19-20). It is also better because, under the new covenant, "they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me from the least to the greatest" (Hebrews 8. 11). And perhaps it is best of all because, in contrast with the old covenant, it promises: "Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more" (Hebrews 8. 12).

There is one more step in the reasoning—a further line of retreat for the dogged Jew. The writer foresees this further counter-argument: that in the last instance, it is not so much the covenant that counts as the offering that a man brings when he approaches God. It was the blood of the offering that dedicated the old covenant (Hebrews 9. 18), and it is the quality of the offering which ultimately counts.

So the writer persists. The new covenant, like the old, was dedicated with blood, but the offering was utterly different. Under the old covenant, the rule was rigid: for every sin there must be an offering. So there was always a danger of falling behind, unconsciously; at best, there could never be any final assurance or end of the sacrifices. Moreover, the mere repetition of the offerings betrayed the fact that sins were still being committed. What God wanted, to put it bluntly, was not more offerings but less sins. His one wish was to have His will done, but as long as there were offerings being made for sin, it was obvious that His will was *not* being done.

The new covenant was dedicated by the blood of Christ Himself, who by one offering perfected for ever

those who are sanctified (Hebrews 10. 14). The wearying sense of incompleteness produced by the old covenant has gone, bringing relief to man. And for God there is the satisfaction of having His will done: "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God." This one offering makes an end of all the others, and the writer can almost make us feel the divine relief as he concludes: "He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second" (Hebrews 10. 9). God did not *want* all those offerings for sin; He wanted to be obeyed.

Here the argument of Hebrews ends, which is not surprising, because no further argument—or, in the case of our imaginary Jewish historian, no further retreat—is possible. To him, as to us, the blood of the sacrifice is the absolute foundation of man's whole relationship with God. And the sacrifice of Christ was better than the sacrifices of the olden days. "For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (Hebrews 10. 14).

THE APPLICATION

The main conclusion drawn by the writer from the argument he has presented is that to under-estimate the greatness of Christ may lead to serious spiritual loss. This conclusion is illustrated by the story of the Children of Israel, and their failure to reach the Promised Land.

The trouble with the Children of Israel was that, when they reached the borders of the land, they decided that they would not risk entering it. As the writer puts it, "they could not enter in because of unbelief" (Hebrews 3. 19). This attitude of unbelief led God to decide that none of the men responsible for this decision should ever enter the land, and they all died in the course of thirty-eight more years of desert wanderings. But we must at once ask the question, "Unbelief in what?" In

Israel's case, it was simply that they did not believe that their God was *great* enough to get them into the land. The giants and the fortified cities loomed larger in their imagination than He did.

During the years in the wilderness, this kind of underestimate of their God had become something of a habit. When food ran short, or they were thirsty, their reaction was nearly always the same—that God's power must have run out, and that His greatness had fallen short of their need. It is true that Moses and Aaron were the targets of most of their complaints, but it was only on the assurance that God was calling them out of Egypt that Israel had ever left that land of slavery which, in retrospect, never ceased to attract them.

The writer of this epistle realised that the same danger was threatening the Jewish Christians to whom he wrote (Hebrews 4. 1). Confronted with doubts and with persecution, they were making the same kind of mistaken estimate of God as their ancestors, and they were in danger of just as great spiritual loss. So he writes to them in the terms of urgent encouragement which are familiar to every student of the epistle—urging them to go on; to enter in; not to fall short, or “shrink back” (Hebrews 10, 38 R.V.). All this encouragement is offered on the sure basis of the greatness of Christ. With such a Christ, there is no reason to fear the difficulties of the way. There is also no excuse for failure. Faith in Him is the key.

This brings us to the famous eleventh chapter of Hebrews, and places it squarely in its context. This chapter on the Men of Faith has brought help in manifold ways to countless Christians; yet in its setting it is simply intended to show the range of obstacles, handicaps and problems which can be overcome by faith in the greatness of God. It is written, at the end of the earlier exhortations, to answer the man who says, “He

may be great enough to solve *your* problem, but not *mine*. Mine is too big; it is in a class by itself."

But with any sort of regard for the evidence that the writer marshals in this chapter, there is no danger that the greatness of Christ will prove insufficient. For here, if we understand them aright, are problems of every kind; not merely the open hazards of persecution or physical need, but the deeper spiritual problems of loneliness and delay, guidance and discernment, or the most fundamental spiritual problem of all—that of submitting to God's way of doing things, even when it all seems to us a mistake. In these thumbnail sketches of great lives, we see Abraham, grappling with the reality of God's strange, paradoxical principle that life comes out of death; Joseph, waiting through all those years of hope deferred for the fulfilment of a vision, and so learning that, however long the *time* may be, what God has said, He will perform ("God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land . . ."); Moses, dealing with a million recalcitrant Israelites in the desert, learning the lessons of the life together, and refusing to be parted from God's people; and finally Samuel, living through the tragic anticlimax of Saul's reign, without becoming bitter or losing hope. And for us (Hebrews 11. 40) God has provided some *better* thing, that they without us should not be made perfect.

GOD'S MAN

The factor which made all this possible was the greatness of a man, Jesus Christ. In view of the situation which we reviewed in the first chapter of this book, it is interesting that the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews is very insistent that it was a *man* who achieved so much. He writes, "Since then the children are sharers in flesh and blood, he also himself in like manner partook of the

same . . . For verily not of angels doth he take hold, but he taketh hold of the seed of Abraham" (Hebrews 2. 14, 16, R.V.). As we recall God's need of a *man* to vindicate Him, we may read with new insight the words of the epistle: "Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a *body* hast thou prepared me . . . We are sanctified through the offering of the *body* of Jesus Christ once for all" (Hebrews 10. 5, 10). And we shall appreciate Him all the more for the writer's assurances (Hebrews 4. 15; 2. 11) that, although Jesus Christ is God, He is also a man who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities and who is, in spite of the immense gulf which separates His achievements from ours, not ashamed to call us brethren.

CHAPTER V

THE GREATNESS OF CHRIST IN EXPERIENCE AND WORSHIP

So far, we have been largely concerned with what might be called the historical case for the greatness of Christ; that is, we have assessed His career and achievements much as we might those of Napoleon or Julius Caesar, using the available evidence, in the same way as the writer to the Hebrews does in the case of Moses and Aaron. But this epistle, as we have just seen, shows us that the greatness of Christ is not merely a fact of history; it is also a fact of experience. So, while it is true that, as we study the Bible, we discover new aspects of His greatness in the stories of His life and the arguments of the apostles, it is also true that, as we confront the problems of everyday life, and are helped by Him to overcome them, we experience His greatness for ourselves; we find that He is great *for us*. As is usually the case in the spiritual life, to possess a knowledge which is purely theoretical, and which is not substantiated by our own experience, is at best frustrating and may be downright dangerous.

Where is thy God, my soul?
Confined to Scripture's page?

In moments of stress we may well ask: "Of what value is His greatness, if He is not great for me?"

THE PLACE OF CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

There is no quicker or surer way of getting Christians to disagree with each other than by canvassing their

views on the nature of Christian experience. Quite apart from the fact that some people do not admit the validity of experience as any sort of guide or common denominator among Christians at all, it seems clear that, in literature and anecdote over the years, Christians have been giving different names to what are really similar experiences. Striving to define what to them is intensely personal, they have done their personal best, but the only result has been a sad confusion of accounts, none of which can be individually contradicted, but many of which must logically contradict each other.

Yet a good deal of this trouble, and the division it causes, might be avoided if, within the context of this chapter, it could be agreed that the most diverse Christian "experiences" seem to have two things in common. Firstly, it is surely true that most of our crises in the Christian life result not so much in our *obtaining* something extra spiritually as in our *realising* something whose significance we had previously missed. It is not that we begin our spiritual lives with meagre resources, and gradually gain access to greater supplies and a fuller armoury of weapons as we go on. The resources are ours, unchangingly, from the start, and our crises are usually crises of realisation, which happen when the Holy Spirit reveals to us something more of the nature of those resources; that is, as He brings heavenly reality progressively home to our hearts.

Secondly, the essence of this reality is the greatness of Christ, in whom are *all* the resources—*all* the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2. 3). Rightly analysed, most Christian experience is a realisation of that greatness, even when the experience is not recognised as such; indeed, even when it is described quite differently by the Christian concerned.

Certainly this is in keeping with the role defined by the Lord Jesus for the Holy Spirit to fill. It is well to

remember that this role was not to give people experiences of Himself, but to reveal Christ: "... he shall not speak from himself . . . he shall take of mine, and shall declare it unto you" (John 16. 13-14, R.V.). The work of the Holy Spirit is to reveal to us the significance of Christ. The Spirit calls our attention to the greatness of His resources, and as we come to realise what we possess in Him, we are able by faith to make use of it. So it is, in the final analysis, the work of the Holy Spirit in revelation that supplies the fuel for Christian progress. Conversely, it is the response of the Christian to that revelation which provides the true criterion of progress. This response shows itself in his appreciation of Christ and in his growing likeness to Him.

This link between appreciation of our resources in Christ and progress in the spiritual life is, as we have seen, the basic theme of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Paul may, or may not, have written that epistle, but he follows much the same train of thought in I Corinthians 10. Once again, as in Hebrews, it is the Children of Israel who provide both example and warning. Paul's warning is that, even in the presence of abundant and assured resources, there may be not progress but disaster. The decisive factor is our response to God's provision. Only a true appreciation of that provision can produce in us the attitude of heart commitment, of determination to possess it, that will enable us to overcome temptation, wage the spiritual war, and receive the incorruptible crown (I Corinthians 9. 25). The Children of Israel "did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of a spiritual rock that followed them; and the rock was Christ. Howbeit with most of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness" (I Corinthians 10. 1-5, R.V.). In the very presence of divine abundance—manna from heaven and water from

the rock—most of them adopted an attitude of unbelief towards the divine Provider. They refused to regard Him as trustworthy, or commit themselves to His grace.

THE NATURE OF CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

With these thoughts in mind, it is interesting to read the life stories of men of God, and to trace beneath a variety of descriptions a common experience of Christ and His greatness. It is surely beyond dispute that the first of all Christian “experiences”—that of the Day of Pentecost—was of this character. What made the day notable was the coming of the Holy Spirit, but the *effect* of His coming, it is clear, was to give the disciples an altogether new conception of the Lord Jesus Christ. Not even the resurrection appearances of Jesus had given them such a conception as this. Suddenly, He seemed greater in His absence than He ever had while He was with them. He now emerged in their realisation as the central figure to whom the Scriptures pointed, the fulfiller of prophecy and the hope of Israel. In Him, the need of a whole people could be met.

Nor, of course, was this all. Later on, there were other experiences, and most of them were concerned with the widening sphere of the Church’s ministry, such as the coming of the Spirit at Samaria, the conversion of Saul, and the events that heralded the entrance of the Gentiles into the Church. But the effect of each was the same as that of the first, at Pentecost; each contributed to a growing appreciation of Christ. Step by step, Peter and the others came to realise that He was great enough to be the answer to the need, not of just one people, but of the whole world. As this realisation dawned, so the Church grew and spread.

From Pentecost, the stream of experience has flowed onwards over millions of individual souls, and all that

we can do here is to notice the effects in a few later cases, picked almost at random from among many. But we can hardly overlook one of the greatest of corporate "experiences" of later times, and one of those that most closely resembled the first outpouring of the Spirit—that of the Moravian Brethren at Herrnhut, on 13 August 1727. This tremendous event has, indeed, been described by its chronicler as a "modern Pentecost" and as a "marvellous baptism with the Spirit."¹ It produced the astonishing spiritual results known to us as the work of the Moravian Missions, and it was shared by some scores of Christians. Zinzendorf, their leader, summarised in a few words the nature of their experience. It was, he said, "a sense of the nearness of Christ".²

If we move on from the eighteenth century to the nineteenth, we find that one of the best-known, and most carefully defined, experiences of that heroic missionary era was the event in the life of Hudson Taylor of China which his biographer has called "The Exchanged Life". From the point of view of the observer, such a title was entirely right, for Hudson Taylor's life was certainly transformed:

"He was a joyous man now, (it was reported of him), a bright and happy Christian. He had been a toiling and burdened one before, with latterly not much rest of soul. . . . Whenever he spoke at meetings after that, a new power seemed to flow from him, and in the practical things of life a new peace possessed him."³

¹ Greenfield, J., *Power From On High, or The Two Hundredth Anniversary of the Great Moravian Revival* (Marshall, Morgan & Scott, London (n.d.)), pp. 13, 19.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 16.

³ Taylor, Dr. and Mrs. Howard, *Hudson Taylor and The China Inland Mission* (C.I.M., London, 6th. Imp., 1921), Vol. II, p. 173.

Most of us are "toiling and burdened" Christians, and almost all of us would welcome an "experience" like that. But what could have made such a difference to one of the greatest of God's servants in modern times; a man who, at the time of this "exchange", had already been marvellously used by God for many a year in China and elsewhere?

Hudson Taylor's own analysis of these events is happily available to us, and it suggests that the title given to them by his biographer is somewhat misleading. What happened was simply that he came to appreciate Christ in a new way—that He not only is great, but is great for us:

"All the time I felt assured that there was in Christ all I needed, but the practical question was—how to get it out . . . When my agony of soul was at its height . . . the Spirit of God revealed to me the truth of our oneness *with Christ* as I had never known it before." ¹

What had been "exchanged" in this transforming experience? One concept of Christ—sufficient to take Hudson Taylor to China, to live by faith and risk death for the gospel's sake, but still inadequate, still not great enough—for another, a realisation that everything is already available for us in Christ; that (as he himself expressed it) we are the branches of the vine, but that He is vine, branches and all.

One other example may be taken to illustrate these arguments, and it is an example from our own times. The nineteen-fifties were a decade of spiritual revival in the Hebrides. Both within the churches and outside them, people were challenged by the extraordinary experiences that were witnessed in crofts and churches—indeed, in barns and fields—in the Outer Isles.

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 175.

Striving for an understanding of these activities of God's Spirit, the man most intimately acquainted with them, Duncan Campbell, has written of them as a "baptism" of the Holy Spirit, and it is very striking that he has defined this by saying: "The baptism of the Holy Spirit in its final analysis is the revelation of Jesus. 'God revealed His Son in me.' " ¹

Together or individually; by manifest crisis or by quietly dawning revelation, we progress in the Christian life by coming to realise what Christ is, for God and for us. We shall always be in danger if we try to retail an experience, by whatever name we know it, for the event is never as important as the effect, nor the moment of spiritual ecstasy as important as its eternal result. What matters is, that by all the means at the command of the Holy Spirit, we should come to appreciate Christ. We might do worse than make a pact with each other, amid the confusion of voices, to adopt this appreciation as the sole criterion by which we judge our own spiritual advance.

CHRIST, THE THEME OF WORSHIP

This growing appreciation of Christ finds expression in our worship, to which it gives both motive and substance. As the Holy Spirit reveals Christ to us, so we come to the Father to tell Him how wonderful Christ is, and how much we value the divine plan that sent Him to us.

God, and He alone, fully appreciates the perfection of Christ, so that we are not telling Him anything that He does not know already. But this, far from being a drawback, is the very reason why God finds pleasure in our worship. His pleasure arises from the fact that we,

¹ Campbell, D., *The Price and Power of Revival* (Parry Jackman, London, 1956), p. 16.

who are His creatures, and who had become His enemies, are now able to join with Him in an intelligent appreciation of His Son. Before we came to Him, we saw Jesus Christ only as a figure of history, but then the Holy Spirit revealed something of His real character, and we began to realise that He is greater than we had thought:

Lord, I was blind; I could not see
In Thy marred visage any grace,
But now the beauty of Thy face
In radiant vision dawns on me.

These discoveries which we make of the greatness of Christ are evidently a source of delight to God, as well as to ourselves. We can, perhaps, form a trivial impression of this delight by recalling that, when we give a friend a present, we may be content with a simple "Thank you", but we shall be much more gratified if we are told of the uses to which it is being put, and the qualities in it which make it of value. On the divine level, God is glad that we are learning the value which He attaches to His Son:

The precious savour of His Christ
Is His delight for evermore,
And our dire need is all sufficed
By Him whom now our hearts adore.

In our worship, then, we offer back to God what He has revealed to us of the perfections of Christ; or, as the same writer puts it:

We lift these hands which Thou hast filled,
We come to bring Thee love's reward.

A GROWING UNDERSTANDING

But here we come to a practical question. If we are to look forward to a progressive revelation of Christ, a

revelation which will then be expressed in our worship, have we any idea of the lines on which the Holy Spirit will work? What will be the nature of this revelation? What is there about Christ and His greatness to be learnt as we go along?

We have already traced some of the steps by which the early Church, for its part, came to a fuller appreciation of Christ. Gradually, its members came to realise that His life and death had altered everything—their status, their outlook, their future. They saw, too, that God was on the move, and they began to understand that the coming of His Son had had its effect upon *God's* plans, releasing the pent-up forces of divine purpose, and opening the way for their fruition. The Holy Spirit was showing them what Christ meant to them, and what He means to God, and the Spirit's work in us today is no other than the work He wrought in them. "He will guide you into all truth."

But to answer our question more fully it may, perhaps, be helpful to fall back on an illustration drawn from the Old Testament. It is the illustration of the Levitical sacrifices. It was by means of these sacrifices that, in the old days, God's people expressed their worship and their appreciation of His greatness. The early chapters of Leviticus prescribe a number of sacrifices, each designed to express a different facet of man's response to God, whether as a sinner seeking atonement, or as a worshipper presenting to his Lord the firstfruits of his crop or the increase of his herd.

Just as there was a variety of offerings so, in turn, each of them could be presented in a variety of sizes and forms. These evidently depended on the resources of the worshipper. The rich brought an elaborate offering and the poor a humbler gift, but all were equally acceptable to God, within the pattern He had ordained.

The New Testament explains the link between this

Old Testament worship and the worship of God's people today. It says that when Christ offered Himself to God, His sacrifice perfectly satisfied God, and brought to an end the era of material offerings which had lasted throughout Old Testament days. His sacrifice was comprehensive; it perfected for ever those who are sanctified (Hebrews 10. 14), or, in Old Testament terms, it was a burnt offering, a meal offering, a peace offering, a sin offering and a trespass offering all in one. God Himself had ordained that original form of worship, and He accepted Christ as its perfect fulfilment and expression; that is, He recognised and accepted in His Son qualities which, for Him, replaced the material sacrifices. These, evidently, are the facets of His life and character which God especially appreciates.

For us, the era of material sacrifices is past; we can never improve upon the one offering of Christ. For us, worship consists of recalling *His* sacrifice, and of recognising those same perfections of Christ that God values. And spiritual growth will lead us to recognise them more and more fully, just as the Israelite, when he became more prosperous, would bring a larger offering—a bullock instead of a sheep, or a lamb instead of a pair of pigeons—in proportion to his wealth.

So we return to our question: what are these perfections of Christ? The offerings of the past may, perhaps, afford us a clue. They fell into two categories: sin offerings and "sweet savour" offerings; those that were required to make atonement for sins, and those that the offerer brought "of his own voluntary will" (Leviticus 1. 3) to express his gratitude or devotion.

AN OFFERING FOR SIN

There is an obvious analogy, familiar to every New Testament reader, between the offerings brought, in

those far-off days, to atone for sins committed, and Christ's offering of Himself once in history as an atonement for sin. And much that the Holy Spirit has to teach us of Christ is concerned with His role as our great Sin Offering. The very beginning of our Christian life comes when the Holy Spirit makes us realise that Jesus Christ is the one through whom we obtain forgiveness of our sins. We realise, sometimes with dramatic suddenness, that He is great enough to deal with them all. In that moment, we begin to appreciate His greatness for ourselves.

But this discovery is only the first of many. Nothing is more striking in the Christian life than the way in which our attitude to both sin and sin offering develops as time goes on, for upon our understanding of the first depends our appreciation of the second. Most of us know that, as we go on in the Christian life, our consciousness of sin does not diminish but rather increases. And this, too, is the work of the Holy Spirit, who wants to ensure that we value the Lord Jesus, our Saviour, at God's own estimation of Him. So we become growingly aware of the awfulness of sin—its all-pervading presence; its harmful effects on other men; its fearful effrontery to a holy God—and in the light of this awareness we are driven to look with fresh wonder at Christ, the Offering acceptable to God, even for such sin as this.

There follows yet another discovery, held in store for us by the Holy Spirit. It is the discovery that Christ is great enough, not only to save us from the effects of our sins, but also to deliver us from sin itself. There is a law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus which makes us free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8. 2). It was this discovery which transformed the life of the apostle Paul (to judge by his account in Romans 7), and which has revolutionised the life of many a mature but toiling Christian since.

Characteristically, this is a discovery which God's servants make only as they persevere in the spiritual life, after they have struggled against sin, and learned its power and despaired of overcoming it. It is indeed a transforming discovery of the greatness of Christ.

Characteristically, too, it is a discovery which Christians make suddenly, just like that initial discovery of Christ that first changed their darkness into light. Why this should be so is not at all clear; it simply happens in that way. Many Christians have recorded the exact moment—at a meal table, in prayer, on a journey—when this realisation dawned. To some of them, it has been as if a new conversion had taken place—a second event, as wonderful as the first. The effect of such an event on the life of a defeated, depressed Christian may well be revolutionary; in any case he is sure to want to tell his friends about it, in whatever terms he can invent, so that they, too, may share the blessing. And to hear of such an experience is to share the joy of the captive's release; to sense again the freedom into which Christ has brought us. Neither circumstances nor terminology, of course, need affect our own, private deduction that what has happened is that, once again, it has "pleased God to reveal his son". That can never happen too often, describe it how we may. We rejoice not in the description but in the greatness of the One revealed.

"AN OFFERING OF A SWEET SAVOUR"

The other offerings of the old covenant—the burnt offering, the meal offering, the peace offering—spoke not of atonement for sin but of the devotion of a cleansed sinner to his God. Whatever may be the precise significance that we attach to each detail of these sacrifices, it seems clear that they speak, firstly, of the devotion of

the Lord Jesus Christ to His Father, and His perfect fulfilment of all God's will; secondly, of the way in which all the value of that devotion becomes ours, as His people "in Christ".

The burnt offerings of the Old Testament—sacrifices which were offered wholly to God in the fire of the altar—remind us of the Son's consuming commitment to the will of the Father: "Lo, I come to do thy will." As God and as man, Jesus Christ gave Himself up to living wholly for that will, the will that led Him to the Cross. So much we can see; and yet the Holy Spirit has as much again to teach us, of what the Father's will meant for Him: of the immensity of His condescension in coming to earth to do it; of His ceaseless, flawless concern that every detail should be fulfilled; of His complete freedom from every conflicting impulse of *self-will*.

We are inclined, sometimes, to regard the life of the Lord rather negatively, in that we assume His greatness to have lain in His avoidance of sin. He *did* lead a sinless life, but He also, positively, did God's will. In situations where no moral issue was involved—in matters of timing, in choices of route, in going or staying—the marvellous thing was that He was never once outside God's will; He was always choosing God's choice, wishing God's wish, and going to the place where God next wanted Him to be. He showed, in His earthly life, dimensions of obedience almost unknown to us. So it is through our own ignorance and failure that we learn, by this contrast, to appreciate Him—by our inability to discern the will of God or choose the right course; by the way in which we confront situations where it seems impossible that *any* course can be right, and so we are left feebly guessing. But this never happened to Him. "Lo, I come to do thy will."

From this it followed that He, alone of all men, could

offer to God actions and thoughts and words—a human life—that were wholly pleasing to Him. We ourselves could never offer to God the works of our own hands and hope with them to satisfy Him, any more than Cain could; we could never hold up to Him our own characters as a fitting expression of all that He has willed for us. But Jesus could, and it is, perhaps, this presentation to God of a life that fulfilled His every requirement of which the meal offering most clearly speaks to us. It is one more facet of the greatness of Christ.

While the burnt offering and the meal offering suggest to us, in this way, the Son's devotion to the Father's will, they remind us also that Jesus Christ, in turn, means everything to God. God has a plan "that all human history shall be consummated in Christ, that everything that exists in Heaven or earth shall find its perfection and fulfilment in Him" (Ephesians 1. 10, Phillips). And as we come to realise the central place that God has allotted to Him in His eternal purpose, so we learn that God intends that Christ should be everything to us also. From the testimony of other servants of God, and from the experiences through which the Holy Spirit may lead us, we learn that there is an appreciation of Christ which transcends the recognition of His particular virtues, and which simply fills a man's whole horizon. Of this culminating point of the Holy Spirit's work of revelation to us, Paul gives, in Philip-pians 1. 21, the only possible definition: "To me to live is Christ."

A NEW RELATIONSHIP IN CHRIST

These Old Testament offerings speak to us not only of the perfections of Christ and our deepening appreciation of them, but also of the way in which, through His devotion, we ourselves have been brought into the new

sphere described by the apostle Paul in the two words, "in Christ". The peace offering, in particular, reminds us that, by the sacrifice of the Cross, the Lord Jesus not only reconciled us to God, but brought us into a new relationship with Him. Of this peace offering, the offerer himself received a part; figuratively, that is, it was something shared between God and himself. In the peace offering, God and man were brought on to common ground; they had fellowship together.

As Christians we may not, at first, realise what this implies. For the disciples of Jesus, as we have already seen, the new relationship and the new privileges seemed incomprehensible in their novelty, until the Holy Spirit had opened their eyes. Nothing is more vital to rapid spiritual progress than a grasp of what it means that we are in Christ; of the privileges that are ours; of the resources which are now at our disposal. But most of us have only a feeble grasp of these facts, and therefore we falter.

When Paul wrote to the Ephesians, he confronted precisely this difficulty. His great longing for them was that they should learn what it means to be in Christ—what riches of glory, what greatness of power, what immensity of love are at the disposal of those who are in Him (Ephesians 1. 16-23; 3. 14-19). So he began by listing all the blessings into which the new relationship had brought them, and then he prayed that the grandeur of this vista—its breadth and length and depth and height—might dawn on them. And knowing that there is nothing that so quickly heightens appreciation as a true perspective on a situation; nothing like hunger to sharpen a man's appetite, or previous despair to help him to enjoy deliverance, Paul deliberately set out to create that perspective. He did this by throwing together, in the sharpest possible contrast, the blessings in heavenly places that we now enjoy in Christ (Ephesians

1. 3-9) and the Death Valley of sin (Ephesians 2. 1-3) from which we have been rescued. What has wrought this immense change? Christ, our Peace Offering: "For he is our peace." He is great enough to do even this; to raise us up even from *such* depths; to establish us—and maintain us—even at *such* dizzy heights. How great He must be!

THE PROCESS OF GROWTH

So a growing appreciation of Christ is vital both to worship and to spiritual progress. But what produces appreciation? This, clearly, is the focal point. If everything else depends on appreciation of Christ, how can mine be increased? Supposing—to go back a little way in this chapter—that I do not appreciate Christ as Zinzendorf or Hudson Taylor did, what can I *do* about it?

There is no lack of recipes in the literature of Christian experience. Yet when, as here, we are dealing with a situation in which it is quite clear that the work of the Holy Spirit is the central factor, we must always be wary of recipes. "The wind bloweth where it listeth." No one can command it; no one can command Him. At best, we may hope to list a few factors which seem to be important, but we can never argue the corollary, that if we have those things, then we shall obtain the result we are seeking.

There seem to be three such factors. Firstly, we shall never appreciate Christ unless we spend time in—to use an old-fashioned word—contemplating Him, which simply means that we must give the Holy Spirit time to do His work. In the whirl of modern existence, this may well be a crucial factor. The very idea of meditating upon Christ and His love has an antique air about it; we associate it, not with ourselves, but with hermits and

holy men of a bygone era. But there is little point in singing,

When I survey the wondrous Cross,
On which the Prince of Glory died . . .

if we do not take time to do so, for to the casual observer the Cross may speak of misplaced chivalry or of devotion to duty, but it does not speak of amazing love.

Secondly, we shall only see more of the greatness of Christ if we are true to what we have seen already. Thus Isaac Watts ends the same great hymn with the words,

Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands. . . .

Each revelation by the Holy Spirit of the greatness of Christ carries with it practical implications: "If Christ is so great, then . . ." If, in respect of this or that particular need, Christ is really so great, then there is an action to be taken, an attitude of faith to be maintained. Not to respond in this way to the Holy Spirit is to close the door to His further revelations.

This is very clearly seen in Paul's discussion of deliverance from sin in Romans 6. Having first assumed that the Holy Spirit has revealed to us the all-important truth, "that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away, that so we should no longer be in bondage to sin" (verse 6, R.V.), he goes on immediately: "Even so reckon ye also yourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body" (verses 11, 12). "Here are the facts—reckon on them, and act on them!" This is the counsel of a man whose personal secret lay precisely in this union between revelation and obedience to the thing revealed: "Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision" (Acts 26. 19).

Thirdly, if we wish to appreciate Christ more fully, then we should ask God to reveal Him to us, and we should expect that He will do so. To quote Horatio Bonar once again:

More of Thyself, oh, show me hour by hour;
More of Thy glory, O my God and Lord;
More of Thyself in all Thy grace and power;
More of Thy love and truth, Incarnate Word.

It is, perhaps, just here that Christians falter. Seeing the solemn implications for their own lives of discovering the greatness of Christ, they are scared to pursue the subject any further; logically, after all, the ultimate implication is that if He is so great, then I am nothing, and the effects of such a conclusion upon my pride, my self-confidence—even my ambition to serve God—are very far-reaching indeed. It is less disturbing to be content with a strictly limited view of Christ and His greatness, one that does not raise awkward practical issues, or involve a change of outlook, conduct or prospects. Nothing could disturb some Christians more than that in their placid spiritual lives something should actually *happen*.

We have already seen, in Chapter III, how the early Church faltered more than once in this way. The most disturbing implication of the greatness of Christ for them was that they were threatened with the loss of their national superiority; if Christ was so great, He could save Gentiles as well as Jews. For them, this was a desperately hard thing to accept; how hard, we can perhaps imagine by bringing the issue up to date a little and substituting the word "denominational" for "national" superiority. There must have been moments when they felt that they would have preferred a more limited Christ—one they could keep all to themselves. Confronted by greatness on this scale, they never knew what would happen next.

To put the problem in another, simpler, form: there is no way of receiving the *results* of the Holy Spirit's work without accepting His *method*, which is to involve us in a lifelong process of spiritual education, a sort of School of Christ. Once again, the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews can be our guide; the twelfth chapter of the epistle speaks of this school, and foresees exactly how "disturbing" this kind of education can be. But the method He uses, unlike some modern educational techniques, stands approved by its own results, for the men of God who have appreciated most of Christ, and progressed furthest in their knowledge of Him, have all been trained by this method.

This brings us to the final point in this chapter: that since this is the nature of Christian progress, we cannot hurry it or take short cuts. The Holy Spirit's revelation of Christ to us will be made in His own time, when He sees that the next step is due. However much we may covet the experience of others, we cannot induce it in ourselves. What we can contribute is an honest, obedient and hungry heart, and in such a heart He will undertake to magnify Christ. He may do it imperceptibly; in a surprising number of cases He does it by sledgehammer blows. The rate of progress is governed not so much by His teaching as by our response.

CHAPTER VI

THE CONTINUING THEMES— (1) THE KINGDOM

THE twin supports of God's original creation, as we saw in the first chapter, were the principles of authority and mutual confidence. Satan undermined both, and the Lord Jesus came, in His dual role of King and Priest, to undo Satan's destructive work.

Firstly, in relation to the great open question "Who is really in control?", He came to reassert God's authority. He destroyed the prince of this world, and is Himself God's chosen King over the whole creation. Because, however, the situation demanded a man not only *in* authority but also *under* authority (see p. 28), the Lord Jesus is, paradoxically, both a king and also a servant. His servant character is just as prominent in Scripture as His kingship (see, for example, Isaiah 42. 1-4; 52. 13; Hebrews 5. 8). It was His willing assumption of the servant's place that qualified Him for the throne (Philippians 2. 7-9), and it did so because, as Servant-King, He answered Satan's authority by re-affirming in His person that of God. Then, secondly, and in relation to the other great and essential task—that of wooing man back into a renewed fellowship with God—He acts on our behalf as a great High Priest. He fulfils the priest's function of serving as a go-between for God and man, interpreting each to the other and, indeed, Himself supplying the means of reconciliation. It is when they are viewed in this light that these familiar titles of Christ take on their true significance.

He is Servant-King and He is Priest, because these were the roles that had to be filled in the aftermath of the Fall.

We can carry this line of thought a stage further. If it is true that the coming of Christ was destined to answer the two great open questions of earth's sin-blighted history, it is also true that, under various guises, these same questions feature very prominently throughout the whole Bible narrative. Indeed, in a strictly quantitative sense, there can be little doubt that they occupy more space in the Bible than any other topic and, in view of their importance, that is not surprising. They appear most prominently under the guise of the twin themes of the Kingdom and the House of God. From the tragic story of Israel's kingdom to the promise of the glorious Messianic rule, and from the plank-by-plank description of the Tabernacle to the visionary Temple of Ezekiel, they provide the subject matter of the Book. They are to be found in the Old Testament and in the New; in the teaching of Jesus, no less than in the pronouncements of the prophets; in the history of Israel, but also in the story of the Church.

We shall consider each of these two themes briefly and separately, but it may be useful first to include them in their places in the completed table whose first part appears on page 22.

<i>The Starting Point</i>	An orderly creation	Fellowship between God and man
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<i>The Nature of the Breakdown</i>	Authority	Confidence
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<i>The Result for Man</i>	Condemned to death	Contact with God lost; ignorance
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<i>The Result for God</i>	No one to do His will	Fellowship with man lost
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<i>The Open Question</i>	Who is really in control?	Who is more attractive; more worthy of confidence?
<i>The Need for Man</i>	Escape to life	Renewed contact with God; knowledge
<i>The Need for God</i>	Authority and order visibly restored	Confidence and fellowship visibly restored, with man, and between men
<i>The Work of Christ</i>	Servant-King	Priest
<i>The Continuing Theme</i>	The Kingdom	The House of God

THE THEME OF THE KINGDOM

The youngest Bible student knows how prominent a place in the Book is occupied by kings and kingdoms. In the Old Testament, the story centres upon one particular kingdom and its relations with its neighbours. In the New Testament, the Lord Jesus refers constantly to a spiritual kingdom, and this theme runs on through the epistles, to reach its climax in the Revelation, a book whose visions are founded on the image of a great coronation and a royal judgement. In spite of the variety of forms, the question of control—that is, the issue of authority—is seldom lost to sight for long.

Throughout most of the Old Testament, the form of the question is this: Could God show through a particular group—the people of Israel—a pattern of control which would correspond to His original intention? If men as a whole were disobedient and out of control, could He yet find here a minority who would act as He had intended that man should? From the first, He covenanted with Israel as a “*kingdom of priests*”

(Exodus 19. 6), who would be subject collectively to Him, but dominant over their neighbours. If they could succeed in this, they would provide Him with the evidence He needed.

But Israel broke that covenant; they disobeyed God, and in consequence He gave them over to their enemies. There were, of course, glimpses of what should have been; there were times when the true impression was given, as for example, on the day when Balaam spoke about them: "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel: the Lord his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them" (Numbers 23. 21). This was exact; if only this could have remained true, it was precisely what God was seeking. But there followed, only a little later in their history, that grimly contrasting description of a land in which moral anarchy was complete, and it is summed up in these significant words: "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21. 25).

With the appearance of Samuel on the scene, there began a great recovery. Israel were given a king, and now the question of control was restated in a more direct form: God had set His king in Zion; would he use his authority as one who was himself subject to God, and would the people accept his authority?

Under David and Solomon, men who were, in a real sense, servant-kings, the kingdom of Israel enjoyed a wonderful heyday, but it was tragically short. It was a zenithal period epitomised by the amazement of the Queen of Sheba—amazement that such a king, with such a God, should reign over subjects so contented and so orderly. She, at least, went away with the impression God had intended should dazzle every spectator. But thirty or forty years later, the splendour had utterly vanished. The kingdom split into two; the kings did

as they pleased; the people followed their example and rebelled against God, until at last they were carried away, prisoners of an alien empire. Prophets were raised up by God to denounce the kings for their failure and the people for their disobedience, but as the Old Testament era closed, and it was obvious that the "open question" had received no conclusive answer, God turned the eyes of these men of vision more and more from the present chaos to the future hope of authority restored: "And the Lord shall be king over all the earth" (Zechariah 14. 9).

THE NEW TESTAMENT AND THE KINGDOM

At the beginning of the New Testament, the theme of the Kingdom at once reappears. The first message of both John the Baptist and Jesus contained its announcement. But now there was a new emphasis. Jesus still spoke, as the prophets had done, of a real and future kingdom; this was what interested, and would always interest, the Jews. But He sought to divert attention away from that material kingdom, and to focus it on a different realm, an immaterial, spiritual kingdom where God's authority could and should be seen, not only in the future but in the present. "And being asked by the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God cometh, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo, here! or, There! for lo, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you" (Luke 17. 20, 21, R.V. margin). What had happened was clear: the worldwide question, "Who is really in control?" was in process of being answered in the person of Jesus, and answered this time conclusively by His unfaltering fulfilment of the role of Servant-King. But for His subjects this very fact only raised the issue afresh in a more direct and personal way. The

question was now being restated in a sharper form: "Who is really in control of *me*?" The presence of Jesus converted a universal issue into a personal challenge.

The Lord Jesus taught that no man can serve two masters, that is, be subject to two different authorities. Furthermore, by His Cross He made it possible for men to change masters or, as Paul put it in Colossians 1. 13, to be delivered from the power of darkness and be translated into the kingdom of His Son. There was now a way of escaping from the authority of Satan, and each man who did so added a little to the evidence that Jesus had triumphed; each man living in freedom from Satan was a further proof that there were limits to his control.

But would Satan accept this verdict of defeat by the Cross? It is clear that he did not. On the contrary, he still claimed undiminished authority—and most of the evidence seemed to be on his side. So the New Testament theme of the Kingdom moves on another stage, with a fresh balance of forces on the world scene: on one side the Christian, assured of final victory through Christ, but left to supply evidence of this victory in the hostile environment of the world; on the other side Satan, doomed to final defeat, but refusing to surrender, and using all the resources of the world and the flesh to destroy the evidence.

AUTHORITY IN THE WORLD

The world and the flesh: the two forces that represent the enemy without and the enemy within. The Christian has to live in a world which is still, effectively, Satan's province, a world where every influence is hostile to his survival, let alone his success. Despite these influences he is to be, to use the time-honoured but still accurate phrase, in the world but not of it; that is, not affected by its attitudes or subject to its control.

Jesus, in fact, exactly described the task of the Christian when He said of Himself, "the prince of this world approaches. He has no rights over me; but the world must be shown that I love the Father, and do exactly as He commands; so up, let us go forward!" (John 14. 30, 31, N.E.B.).

What do we mean when we say that the world is a hostile environment? Primarily, we mean that, as the area of Satan's present control, the world takes its character from its prince. This character commonly betrays itself as a certain *outlook*—as a way of assessing things. The world is known, firstly, by its standard of values; that is, by the things it thinks important and that it uses as—to adopt the modern term—status symbols; and when the spirit of the world starts to infiltrate into the Church, this is often how it can most easily be detected—by a concern for religious status symbols. The first and most glaring example of this came to light in the storm over circumcision that shook the early Church so severely. It was nothing less than a worldly concern for status that Paul countered with devastating force in Galatians 6. 14, with his "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." To Paul, the Cross of Christ was the only "status symbol" he recognised.

The world also betrays itself by its ignorance of spiritual things. In the last analysis, it was men's spiritual ignorance that brought the Lord Jesus to the Cross. For there exists a wisdom which, because it derives from the Spirit of God, and comes down to men only in their obedience to God, remains wholly out of the reach of the world. That "hidden wisdom", Paul says, "none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (I Corinthians 2. 7, 8). Upon a world that is so

totally ignorant of the Kingdom of God, it is not difficult for Satan to maintain his grip.

With such a world, in which it generally appears that the question of control has been finally settled in favour of Satan, the Christian under the lordship of Christ can never become reconciled, although a persistent vain hope seems to survive in many a breast that the impossible may happen. But God is not interested in reconciliation except through the Cross, and the Cross marks not a truce between equals but the triumph of God over all opposition.

THE FLESH AND THE QUESTION OF CONTROL

In his struggle to retain control in spite of his defeat, Satan has one great source of strength: the enemy within, which Paul calls the flesh. Between the world and the flesh there is merely a difference of scale; the one is a microcosm of the other. The situation is in all other respects the same—the same enemy, the same techniques, the same false standard of values and ignorance of spiritual things, and the same point at issue, that of control.

For us, when we become Christians, to discover that there is a Fifth Column operating within us, something in treasonable alliance with Satan, must come as a shock. To Paul, to judge by the autobiography of Romans 7, it was a shattering discovery. But he leaves us in no doubt that this division of loyalty exists: “. . . the mind of the flesh is enmity against God; for it is *not subject to the law of God*, neither indeed can it be” (Romans 8. 7, R.V.). Thus we can never succeed, by merely cutting ourselves off from the world, in quarantining ourselves against Satan's influence; he has his foothold *inside* any barrier we may build, and behind the barrier rages, in microcosm, the same conflict for control that goes on,

outside, on the immensely larger scale of the world scene. Flesh and spirit, whatever the scale, are unalterably opposed to each other (Galatians 5. 17).

This of course means that, to be for God, we must be against ourselves. We cannot be, at one and the same time, *for* God's control in the world and *against* His control in us, although we all too often try. But we confront, in this spiritual battle, a situation which has its very clear counterpart in the annals of military operations. It sometimes happens, in battle, when the troops of opposing sides are fighting at close quarters, that the supporting fire needed to beat off an enemy attack can only be obtained by the friendly troops calling for fire *on their own positions*. They themselves may suffer as a result, but they accept the risk in order to make sure that the enemy, whose position the artillery cannot distinguish from their own, shall at any cost be driven off.

Satan's control of the flesh can only be broken if we ourselves are prepared to be against him—and for God—there. All that makes the world a contradiction of God's authority is true also of the flesh. To be against Satan means to be against ourselves, and it is this that being "for God" demands of us. We are back once more with our long-standing "open question", this time restated for us not merely as regards an initial decision, but as a daily or hourly challenge: "Whose authority shall I accept?" In any given situation, if I choose for the flesh, I am opposing the authority of God; if I choose for God, I am deliberately opposing the inclination of the flesh.

How is this possible—to be against ourselves and our own inclinations or, in Jesus' own words, to "deny" ourselves? There are, surely, two factors to remember. The first is that although we suffer the handicap that the flesh is a foothold for Satan, yet we also enjoy the advantage that we have an indwelling Christ, of whom it is

eternally true that "greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (I John 4. 4). Whatever the menace of the enemy within, it is outweighed by the presence of his Conqueror. If the flesh is real—and we are unlikely for long to harbour any illusions on that score—then so is He.

This is the nature of the Christian life, and this is the importance of insisting that being a Christian is not a matter of following a code, but of having Christ within: "I live; and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me: and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God" (Galatians 2. 20, R.V.). The importance of this truth lies precisely in the fact that if we neglect it, while trying to "deny" ourselves, we shall certainly fail; no one can be consistently against himself without *some* reinforcement—the flesh will win sooner or later. Paul had to point this out to the Colossians, who were evolving a religion of rules, aimed at "legislating" the flesh under control. As well try to stop a runaway horse with a butterfly net: these rules, said Paul, "have indeed a show of wisdom in . . . severity to the body; but are not of any value against the indulgence of the flesh" (Colossians 2. 23, R.V.).

The truth that "Christ liveth in me", revealed (often with sudden clarity) by the Holy Spirit, and received by faith, is the real key to the spiritual warfare. The subject is an immense and vital one and it can only, in the present study, be placed here in its context and left. To summarise that context: there *is* a warfare, in which victory is won by counting on Christ within, and by letting Him live His life there and choose His way.

Yet on our side there remains a choice to be made, and here is the second factor that we must take into account. The Lord Jesus' own prescription for the life of the sons of the Kingdom was: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness: and all these

things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6. 33). Paul added two other versions of the same prescription: "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh" (Galatians 5. 16); and "Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are upon the earth" (Colossians 3. 2, R.V.). Whichever statement we take, the principle is the same—that the Christian life is a process of moral choice. A dozen, or a hundred, times a day our loyalty will be challenged, and we shall confront once again the question that Adam confronted, and that caused his downfall: "Whose authority shall I accept?"

By a tragic irony, in the lives of many defeated Christians these two factors—dependence and moral choice—work not together but in competition. Such Christians are fairly evenly divided, numerically, between those who are trying in their own strength to make the right choices, and those who, counting on Christ within, assume that there will be no need to choose—no decisions and no struggle. But either view by itself can lead to an unbalanced life. The first group will have to discover, as Paul did, that the good they would like to do they cannot, while the evil that they try to avoid overwhelms them (cf. Romans 7. 19). The second group must learn that for Christ to live His life in them implies not only His presence and strength but also His lordship. It demands of them a constant response to His instructions, and a constant acceptance of His way. The lordship of Christ can never simply be taken for granted; victory over the flesh is never won by default. His victory is *for* us in so far as His lordship is *over* us.

To set our minds on things above means choosing, by daily decisions, for Him and not for ourselves, for His interests and against our self-interest, for heaven and not for earth. Our citizenship is in heaven, and our

choice must be for heaven too. Upon our response to this challenge depends not merely our own welfare, but the all-important evidence of God's authority *visibly* restored.

This great Bible theme of servant-kingship moves on to a tremendous climax. We see every knee bowed to the authority of Christ, and all the kingdoms of the world made over to Him. That He is entitled to them can hardly be disputed, for it is His own greatness that has recovered them for their Creator. And yet, to the very last, He is true to His role as God's perfect "man under authority", for we find that His only ambition is to hand them back to His Father: "And when all things have been subjected unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subjected to him that did subject all things unto him, that God may be all in all" (I Corinthians 15. 28, R.V.).

To us is given the promise of a share in that day of victory and coronation. To us, however, is also given the opportunity to anticipate that day; to accept His authority *now*, and to show by our lives that, where we are concerned, He *is* in control—that, contrary to all appearances, He has done all things well.

I cannot tell how He will win the nations,
How He will claim His earthly heritage,
How satisfy the needs and aspirations
Of East and West, of sinner and of sage.
But this I know, all flesh shall see His glory,
And He shall reap the harvest He has sown,
And some glad day His sun shall shine in splendour,
When He the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is known.
W. Y. Fullerton

CHAPTER VII

THE CONTINUING THEMES— (2) THE HOUSE OF GOD

Now therefore arise, O Lord God, into thy resting place,
thou, and the ark of thy strength.

(II Chronicles 6. 41)

... the house of God, which is the church of the living
God. ...

(I Timothy 3. 15)

THERE is no difficulty in identifying in the Bible theme of the Kingdom the great issue of God's authority in His creation. At first sight, however, it may be less obvious that the other major issue with which we began this study—that of confidence between God and man—is embodied in the theme of the House of God. Yet a little reflection will surely lead the Bible student to this conclusion. If we merely argue from the evidence provided by the subject matter of the Scriptures, we must assume that a topic which occupies so great a share of the text is one of the utmost importance to the Author. If, on the other hand, we summarise in a few words the problem of renewing confidence—words like contact, fellowship, rest, mutual understanding—then we find that it is in the House of God that all these are provided. It is here, if anywhere, that the problem can be solved.

In the House of God there is a point of contact between God and man. In the House, too, there is a recognised ground or basis of meeting, and there is a service of intermediaries (the priests) to bring about the

meeting and to interpret the estranged parties to each other. In His House, God has said that He is ready to come and live, and so return to the heart of His creation from the solitude to which He had withdrawn when sin entered it. Just as the Bible story of the Kingdom leads, step by step, to the reassertion of God's full authority, so in the history of God's House we can trace the growth of His purpose to draw man back to Himself and to restore full and mutual confidence.

If we see it in this light, the theme of the House of God assumes great significance; a significance exactly equal, in fact, to that of the theme of the Kingdom. This being the case, it is interesting to pause here and try to discover why, when the two matters are equally important, the first is so neglected by Christians, in contrast to the second. They talk constantly about making efforts on behalf of the Kingdom of God, of extending the Kingdom and supporting the King, yet almost never of building the House. At best, Christians generally regard the two phrases as synonymous whereas, if the argument of this book is valid, it is of the highest importance to distinguish between them. They relate to two different aspects of Satan's work, both of which were dealt with by the Lord Jesus Christ, and both of which impose responsibilities upon His followers who live in the good of His victory. To judge by the contemporary scene, it is possible for Christians to observe energetically their responsibilities regarding the Kingdom of God, while neglecting entirely the parallel responsibilities of the House, with which this chapter will deal.

The probable explanation of this enigma is simply that the teaching of Jesus dealt with the Kingdom of God and not, explicitly, with the House. But the epistles strike a very fair balance between the two themes, which means that the apostles, at least, had

grasped its importance beneath the surface of Jesus' ministry. So we can, perhaps, carry our explanation a little further. There is a difference in *tone* in the Bible's treatment of these two themes, and having reviewed their background in the previous chapters of this book, we should not find such a difference surprising.

The Kingdom is dealt with in the New Testament in a thoroughly positive way; we are enjoined to seek first the Kingdom, and promised that Jesus shall reign over all. The authority of God *must be* restored, and all rebellion crushed. In this context, the prime quality required of the Christian is obedience—unquestioning submission to the Lordship of Christ. No one who reads either the teaching of Jesus or the epistles can possibly overlook that clear duty.

But when we consider the House of God, we are thinking of quite different relationships such as confidence, attractiveness and fellowship, and here we may well expect a difference in tone. No one can command another person to have confidence in him, or to be attracted to him. By adopting a certain tone of voice a drill sergeant may make his squad obey him, but he will not, by the same tactics, make a woman love him. We have seen that God set Himself the task of wooing man back, and of regaining man's confidence in Him, and that could never be fulfilled by force.

The House of God represents the heart and focus of God's plan to win man back and there is, in consequence, a certain divine reticence about it which is perfectly in keeping with the situation. Here we are in the realm not so much of what God demands as of what He wishes. To His subjects, the royal wish is their command, but it follows from what has been said here that, while the practical quality demanded by the Kingdom is obedience, the quality needed in con-

nection with the House of God is *spiritual discernment*—the ability to pierce through this divine reticence to the heart of God.

The simplest way to explain this quality of discernment is to refer to the example of David. The subject of a House for God is raised in II Samuel 7, in a dialogue between David and the Lord; and if we leave aside that other remarkable occasion in Genesis 18 when God talked to Abraham, the scene depicted here resembles more closely, perhaps, than any other in the Old Testament, an intimate talk between friends. David had discerned God's wish to live among men, although, as God Himself testified, He had given no previous hint of such a desire (II Samuel 7. 7). David discerned that God ought to have a House—a "resting place". He saw, as we should see, that God does not command, but invites, men to have fellowship with Him.

David realised this because he had a heart for God; he was, from God's side, "a man after my own heart" (Acts 13. 22). But alas, what David had, most of his successors lacked; they could simply see no purpose at all in the elaborate business of the House and its upkeep, and so their heart was not in it. The relationship which the House called for was sustained, not by orders, but by mutual trust and love.

THE PURPOSE OF THE HOUSE

The House of God, which is first mentioned in Genesis 28. 17, and which is still in view in Revelation 21. 3, has always served several clear purposes.

Firstly, as God's dwelling place on earth, it has kept in view the fact that, although man's sin obliged God to banish him from His presence, yet God did not regard that banishment as final, or by it wash His hands of His

creation. The House provided a point of contact between God and man, when no other contact remained. At this one point, God and man could meet.

Secondly, the House has acted as a repository for God's glory. In the Tabernacle and the Temple, this glory was evidently present in visible form; it appeared when these Houses were ready for their Occupier, and hung as a cloud over the structure. So the purpose of the House has been to give to ignorant mankind an impression of what God is like. The glory in the House has served as a manifestation of His character, in much the same way, of course, as we betray our character to those who visit us in our own homes, and who see their arrangement and sense their atmosphere. If anyone became dissatisfied with his own ignorance of God, or with the false impressions of Him that were current, he has always been able to go to God's House and satisfy himself of the reality.

Thirdly, the structure of the House has been an expression of the way to God; that is, of the ground and manner of contact that God has allowed man to have with Himself. This is most clearly seen in the Tabernacle, where God laid down conditions for every phase of the House's use—the requirements for sacrifices, the movements of the priests, the rules of entry. Each of these conditions, as well as the layout of the House itself, from gate to Holy of Holies by way of the altar and laver, helped to define the way to God. It showed that there was contact between God and man—on His conditions.

Fourthly, the House has been the place from which God speaks. In Solomon's Temple, this function is stressed by the fact that the Holy of Holies is referred to as the "oracle", the place from which the word of God was proclaimed. This word of God, transmitted to Solomon by the gift of divine wisdom, was evidently

one of the outstanding features of the Temple era; people came from far and near to hear "the wisdom of God" that was in Solomon (I Kings 3. 12, 28). After centuries of ignorance about God, the divine wisdom was at last available to men, in Jerusalem.

Lastly, the House has been intended, above all, to express the sense of mutual trust, of rest and fellowship, which existed in the Garden of Eden and was lost at the Fall. Satan did his best to make sure that such a relationship between God and man should never again be possible. But the existence of the House has borne eloquent if silent witness to the fact that God was prepared again to live among men, and that He was there because the House provided Him with a "resting place"; because, in short, it was where He wanted to be.

Seen in this light the House of God, whatever its form at any particular moment in its history, has supplied both God and man with exactly what they needed for the reversal of Satan's working. Because this has been true it is, perhaps, inevitable that Satan has been particularly active in trying to distort, and so spoil, the idea for which the House stood. Just as he did at the beginning with Adam, so in later history he has concentrated his efforts, not so much on a challenge by force, as on an attempt to undermine confidence. If we understand what the House of God is *supposed* to be like, and compare with this its actual state, we are forced to recognise to what degree he has been successful in his seduction.

THE STORY OF THE HOUSE

Owing to the constant efforts of God's enemy to destroy everything for which it stands, the history of the House has been a very erratic one. There was first the

Tabernacle in the wilderness, designed in its smallest details by the direct command of God. Over this structure hung the cloud of God's glory, and whenever the cloud moved, the Tabernacle followed. In this way, God kept His pilgrim people in contact with Himself; He not only laid down the conditions on which that contact was made but also, by moving the cloud, decided *where* the point of meeting should be. Inside the Tabernacle, as the writer to the Hebrews notes, all the details of furnishing and layout formed a parable (or a copy or shadow; cf. Hebrews 9. 9; 9. 23; 10. 1, R.V.) of spiritual realities, the key to whose understanding he offers to us. They all spoke of a "way into the Holiest"—of a way from man to God (Hebrews 9. 8). In the days of the Tabernacle, this way was so circumscribed by God's rules of approach as to be impassable to all but the High Priest, and he might enter only once a year. But the important thing was that it existed; there *was* a contact, however restricted it may have been.

With the cloud of God's presence to guide them, and in spite of many a breakdown, the people, with the Tabernacle in their midst, at last reached the Promised Land—their "resting place". Once that land had been subdued, and their rest was assured by David, the nomads' House—the Tabernacle—was replaced by a permanent building, the Temple of Solomon. Now God, too, should have His resting place. Once again, He provided the plans (I Chronicles 28. 19); once again the cloud of God's glory came down upon the House. The new structure was much more splendid than the old one, as befitted a people no longer striving to enter into rest, but enjoying God's blessings in their fulness; the old brazen altar was replaced by a much larger one, and in place of the one laver in the Tabernacle there were now ten lavers and a "sea". Inside the House, the priests carried out their ordered service, under the basic

rule of each successive House of God, "Holiness to the Lord" (Exodus 28. 36).

But the relationship did not last. The cause of the breakdown was sheer carelessness about the basic rule of holiness; the result was that Israel's contact with God was broken. There came a day when Ezekiel saw in a vision the glory of God's presence leave the Temple, as it must, long since, have left it in reality (Ezekiel 10-11). It was a vision of God withdrawing from what He could no longer approve. He could never be at rest in a place where every act of carelessness was a violation of His perfect holiness.

In the end, the Temple was destroyed, and although it was twice rebuilt—once under Zerubbabel (Ezra 5-6) and once by Herod—there is no mention of the cloud of God's glory coming back to grace these Houses. Those who built with Zerubbabel had to be content with a promise: "I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts: and in this place will I give peace" (Haggai 2. 7-9). But it was a promise that was never fulfilled in their lifetime. Those who watched the great Temple of Herod rise on the same site fared far worse. They admired it, only to hear pronounced over it a tragic epitaph: "Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate" (Matthew 23. 37, R.S.V.). It was *their* house now, filled, not with the glory of God, but with those who bought and sold. It had become a den of thieves.

THE HOUSE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Where, then, was the House of God to be found when the New Testament era opened? Had God surrendered His point of contact? Had He allowed Himself to be

driven away again by the same failures and sins of man as at the first? Was He nowhere to be found?

The answer to all these questions is given to us by the evangelist John. With the lightest touch of the pen, he points the way to the new House of God: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt [Gr. *tabernacled*] among us, (and we beheld his glory . . .)" (John 1. 14). To behold God's glory now, to hear His word, to discover what He is really like, it was no use looking for a building, and certainly not the empty shell in Jerusalem. But on a hillside in Galilee, or at a marriage in Cana, or beside the Pool of Bethesda—there men might discover the truth about God. "Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."

Christ was the great House of God, fulfilling to perfection all the functions it was supposed to serve. The House was to give an impression of the character of the Owner, and Jesus perfectly portrayed God. The House was to be the place from which God spoke to men, and Jesus came as the Word made flesh, to speak the wisdom of God more fully than ever Solomon had done. The House was to be a home where God could be found, day or night, by those who sought Him, and John seems to have taken particular pleasure in describing some of the visitors who came to this living "House", the Lord Jesus, with exactly this purpose in mind. God never had to leave this House because of any offence to His holiness. On the contrary, He became more accessible than ever before; the old restricted access of the priests into the Tabernacle was now replaced by a new way into the Holiest Place, open to all (Hebrews 10. 20). In passing from a material to a personal expression of the House, God was progressing towards His goal of confidence and fellowship fully restored.

Then Christ went away. The next link in the chain

was so unexpected that, even after it had been actually forged by the Holy Spirit, the reality was only slowly understood. Indeed, Paul speaks of it as "a mystery" (Ephesians 3. 3), only made known by God's revelation "unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit". But in the light of the spiritual morning that followed Pentecost, the truth stood revealed. The House of God was no longer a building: it was a group of people. All that the Tabernacle had meant to God was now to be fulfilled and expressed through them. Much more: all the extra meaning that had been wrought into this symbol by the Lord Jesus, the living House, was now their responsibility to discharge. This group was the Church—"the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (I Timothy 3. 15).

CHURCH AND HOUSE

In order to understand this tremendous development in God's purpose, we turn automatically to Paul's epistle to the Ephesians, for it was to Paul that there was given the main responsibility for explaining this new role to those who were to fulfil it. In the Ephesian epistle—as also in the Corinthian—it is clear that the analogy of the Old Testament House is constantly in his mind.

The Church, he explains in Ephesians 2, is the product of the Cross, for the effect of the Cross was to break down all barriers between men, and form them into a new society. And as men are brought together in this society, they are "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an

habitation of God through the Spirit" (Ephesians 2. 20-22).

All the functions of the older Houses are now ours to fulfil. Let us recall what these functions are, for the list is a sobering one. The purpose of God requires, firstly, that there should be, here on earth, a point of contact with heaven—a colony of heaven (to use a familiar phrase) in close touch with the "mother country". It is to help to break down the world's ignorance of spiritual things, and to keep men reminded of the existence and the demands of a God whom they prefer to disregard.

Secondly, we have the task of showing what God is like. This was the task so perfectly performed by Jesus during His lifetime; it now devolves upon His Church. Not only does the task have to be repeated for every generation, but the figure of Jesus Himself has become so distorted and overlaid with accretions of sentiment and misunderstanding that His perfect portrayal of God has, so to speak, to be presented afresh by His people. The cloud of glory that once lay over the Tabernacle and over the Temple should now find another resting place: the glory of His likeness and His character in His Church. "Unto him be glory in the church."

Thirdly, we have a responsibility to those who are seeking God, to ensure that the way to Him is made plain to all. Whoever they are, and wherever they are found, we must be able to bring them to make personal contact with Him.

Fourthly, the House is to be the place from which God speaks—the "oracle" of Old Testament days. As it happens, this is a responsibility better appreciated outside the Church than in it; the man in the street is constantly and loudly inviting the Church to make oracular pronouncements on everything from nuclear

war to birth control. For the most part, the Church is hesitant to respond, and understandably so, for the proclamation of God's word for today can only come from those who, like Solomon, have "the wisdom of God"; from those who, like the Lord Jesus Himself, live in the very presence of the God who speaks.

VINDICATION

In all these ways, the House which is the Church is to serve mankind, meeting those needs of man which we analysed earlier. But its responsibilities do not end there. God is still waiting for His vindication—for the *evidence* that He has won men back into fellowship with Himself, and into love and unity with each other. The House is the place where this evidence is to be found. These are the very things of which it should speak.

The Church of God is a unique creation, the product of the Cross, and God has assigned to it this unique role in His purpose: to supply the evidence that would vindicate Him, not merely in the eyes of ignorant men, but also in those of far more intelligent spiritual beings. This is how Paul describes this role in Ephesians 3. 10: "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." For Paul, the word "Church" has a functional significance. It is not simply to exist, but to act; to supply the necessary evidence that, all appearances notwithstanding, God in His creation *has* acted in "manifold wisdom".

We need not be surprised that Paul and the early Church found this "mystery" overwhelming; we ourselves could well afford to be more daunted by it than

we commonly are—that God would deliver His reputation, for the present, so wholly into the hands of those who make up His House. This is a responsibility whose magnitude we must somehow grasp. But how to make Christians see it?

Here we have precisely the problem that faced Paul when he wrote the Ephesian epistle. *He* realised what was at stake, and so he wrote the epistle, using all the force of his masterly mind and all the authority of his spiritual position, to make his readers realise it too. He first drew for them a picture of God's greatest things—His love, His purposes, their privileges—and then, when they realised the immensity of the issues involved, he confronted them with a single word, "therefore": "I *therefore*, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called" (Ephesians 4. 1, R.V.). Because of the importance of the calling; because of what is at stake; because God's manifold wisdom is hidden—indeed, is denied—*therefore* a whole universe of purpose depends on our walking worthily. And what follows is so practical that it seems almost an anticlimax: "Let him that stole steal no more", and "Be ye kind one to another" (Ephesians 4. 28, 32). But it is upon such things as these that the evidence of the manifold wisdom of God depends.

THE LIFE TOGETHER

Of this immense responsibility, one thing must immediately be said—it is a group task. It is the responsibility of the whole Church, for nothing less than the whole could hope to put on display the "manifold" wisdom of God. No amount of individual brilliance will do as a substitute. The Christian life is a life together, or it is nothing. The House has got to speak of divisions healed and contact restored, not only between

God and man, but also between men themselves. This life together with God is the Church's unique, all-important contribution to the process of His vindication.

This is at once evident from Paul's treatment of the Church's task in Ephesians 4. His call to a worthy walk is followed by a list of just those qualities necessary for a life *together*: long-suffering, forbearance, love. All these, and the exercise of the gifts of the Spirit, are needed if there is to be spiritual growth—the growth of the whole Body of Christ. What matters is the state of the Body, and its increase towards “the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Ephesians 4. 13).

For the Church, nothing is more important than this, yet no Christian who has any experience of the life of God's people today can seriously dispute that this is our most glaring weakness. The life together—the Whole which is greater than the sum of the parts, and which should not merely exist but *function*—either does not exist at all, or else takes the form of a series of mutually exclusive circles, ecclesiastical clubs as someone has called them, often held together only by social pressures or a misplaced sense of camaraderie. What is needed is “glory in the Church”.

SATISFACTION

Our list of the Church's responsibilities is almost, but not quite, complete. At the beginning of this study (p. 17), we saw that the entrance of sin not only seemed to imperil the reputation of God, and so set up the need for Him to be vindicated; it also robbed Him of something which He evidently valued—the fellowship of man. The House of God is to be for Him a place not only of vindication but also of satisfaction. God has not

restored fellowship with man merely to advertise His grace; He has done it because He actually *wanted* that fellowship. Somehow, God finds pleasure in being "at rest" among men, and in being accepted by them in their midst. While this is an Old Testament theme, it takes on a new dimension at the Cross, for there God showed the full extent of His longing for renewed contact, and the lengths to which He would go to prove His goodwill to men.

How does this affect our attitude to the House of God? It surely means that, when we are thinking of the House and of our responsibilities within it, we must always remember that we are dealing not with mere mechanical fulfilment of certain duties, still less with the running of an organisation called "the Church", but with the object of God's own affection, "which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20. 28).

It was to the elders of the Ephesian church that Paul used those words. The tone, and indeed the words themselves, find an echo in his epistle to the same church, the epistle upon which we have already drawn so heavily in this chapter. Here, then, in the language of Ephesians, is the measure of God's wish for fellowship with men, and the satisfaction which it brings Him: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it . . . that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish."

God has not only won men back to the relationship with which He and they started their history together. He has gone far beyond that starting point, and admitted them to a new relationship of deeper intimacy. Perhaps something of this underlies the words of the prophet: "He shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied."

THE LAW OF THE HOUSE

As His Church, we are called to a great task. How can we hope to carry it out, and what guidance have we to help us?

In the House of God there have always been two basic rules. The first is the law of holiness: "This is the law of the house; . . . the whole limit thereof round about shall be most holy" (Ezekiel 43. 12). All the failures in the former Houses have been due to carelessness about this law, carelessness that has usually shown itself in attempts to make the stringent requirements of God's holiness less onerous for lazy people. But such short cuts can never be taken when we are dealing with the absolute standards of God, and it was as He was preparing Ezekiel for a vision of His glory returning to the Temple that He laid down this law of holiness. The glory returned when not only the House but the whole mountain top was holy, "and all the forms thereof, and all the ordinances thereof" were being scrupulously observed (Ezekiel 43. 11).

In the new, spiritual House as in the old, the main danger is still that of unholiness. Conscious of the breaches of this law in one small part of this House, Paul wrote to a young church: "Ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; . . . wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you" (II Corinthians 6. 16-17). Unholiness can never exist alongside "glory in the Church".

The second rule of the House is not explicit in the Scriptures, but it is implied by the minute detail of the specifications for the Tabernacle and the Temple. In the House, everything must speak of the Occupant: every detail is important, and nothing is left to human

decision. This, as we have seen, was the great feature of the life of the Lord Jesus; He did God's will all the time. The House of God is a copy and shadow of the heavenly sanctuary. The copy must be exact.

We need, however, to be clear about what this involves. Since we are dealing now, not with a material Tabernacle but with a spiritual House, it is not primarily the material forms of the Church with which we are concerned. As a matter of fact, it is doubtful whether the New Testament gives us enough detail to enable us to build up a set of material forms for the spiritual House; there is certainly no New Testament counterpart of the descriptions of those older Houses. All the concern of the New Testament is for spiritual form, and the material form is called in question only when (as in Corinth) there is grave disorder in the spiritual sphere. The material form is seen as important in so far as it is an expression of the spiritual reality, and no further. In the House of God, in short, the only criterion of form is: does this speak of the nature of Christ, or does it not? Some forms give clear, accurate expression to the character of God, and the way to Him through Christ, and they are good forms. Others confuse or distort the picture of this relationship, and they are bad forms. The form is important, not for itself, but for what it illustrates of the "heavenly things".

There is a third rule of the House, inapplicable in the days of tent and stonework, but crucial now that the House is a living Temple. It is the law of love, the "new commandment" instituted by the Lord Jesus in exactly this context, just before He went away. Love is the visible sign of God's presence in His spiritual House, the all-important ingredient that figures so prominently in Paul's "worthy walk" in Ephesians 4. It is the one thing without which the "manifold wisdom" of God can never be displayed.

So these rules serve as our guide in carrying out the great joint task that confronts us. But although it is the life together that is the vital contribution of the Church to the purpose of God, this does not mean that the isolated Christian has no part to play. Even where there is nothing that looks remotely like the true House of God, there is work to be done and a position to maintain, for the rules of the House still apply. Even where there is, geographically, no life together, it is still possible to be a "together" kind of person in attitude and outlook, under the law of love.

Let us restate this assertion in another, and entirely practical, form. We contribute to the life together, whatever our circumstances, in so far as our actions are carried out with due regard to the whole Body of Christ. To act according to the law of love means never to act in the interests of anything less than the whole Body, and never to act in a way that is harmful to another member. We break the law, and undermine the life together, if we act in our own interest against that of another member, or in the interest of a part of the Body against the interests of another part. What matters is that, having once understood the nature of our calling, we should live in the light of this truth: that we belong together, and the welfare of one is the welfare of all. (Cf. I Corinthians 12. 27.)

THE FRUITS OF THE LIFE TOGETHER

But what of the welfare of mankind as a whole? Does the law of love not bring any benefit to the world outside, languishing in its ignorance and confusion?

For an answer to this well-worn question we might do worse than return to the visions of Ezekiel. We have already seen how he was shown the glory of God leaving the Temple. But he also saw it, in his vision, come back

to a purified House (Ezekiel 43. 2). And from this House to which the glory had returned there flowed a remarkable river. Gushing forth from the Temple, and growing deeper as it ran on, it flowed eastwards, out from Jerusalem (Ezekiel 47. 1-5).

The point of the vision surely lies in the geography. The river is said to flow "towards the sea", and to bring life and healing to the waters into which it pours, with trees and fishermen upon its banks. What sea is this, which is so marvellously affected by the river? Due east of Jerusalem lies the Dead Sea, one of the earth's most cruelly arid and lifeless places, its waters too salt to support life or encourage the fisherman. The eastward course of this river of life would enter the sea of death just at the point where the Jordan, the Bible's symbolic river of death, enters it today. A river of life replaces the waters of death. And this is the prophet's vision of the House of God as it was intended to be, with an outflow that reaches into the most dead and fruitless places and brings them back to life and fertility: ". . . and the fruit thereof shall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for healing" (Ezekiel 47. 12, R.V.). It would be hard to improve upon this picture of the fruitfulness of the life together—and harder still to avoid its challenge.

* * *

The theme of the House, like that of the Kingdom, moves on to a wonderful climax, described for us in the closing verses of the Bible. There is a new heaven and a new earth, and the river of life is there, too, with the tree of life on its banks—that tree from which Adam had been barred so long before. In view of all that has taken place during the intervening ages, one of the marvels of this day and this scene is that "the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people" (Revelation 21. 3). In

spite of all Satan's efforts to separate God and man, to keep man in ignorance and to delude him with false impressions of God; in spite, too, of the carelessness and failure of the Church, the greatness of Christ has overcome every hindrance, and fellowship has been restored. Not only has mutual confidence been established, but it has grown into love, for the Bride is ready, and the Tabernacle of God is with men.

"I *therefore* . . . beseech you that ye walk worthily."

CHAPTER VIII
THE CONTINUING THEMES—
(3) THE CITY

Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great king.
(Psalm 48. 2)

Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined.
(Psalm 50. 2)

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee.

(Psalm 122. 6)

How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people! how is she become as a widow! . . . from the daughter of Zion all her beauty is departed.

(Lamentations 1. 1, 6)

THE twin themes of the Kingdom and the House which run, side by side, through the whole Bible, bring to an end our twofold consideration of the greatness of Christ. But because parallel lines meet only at infinity, the Christian may, by this time, be feeling the need of some unifying concept. Happily, the Bible itself provides us with just such a concept, which brings together the practical issues of the other two great themes. This third theme is that of the City.

In Britain, when financiers speak of "the City", everyone knows that they mean London. No one supposes that they are talking about Glasgow or Birmingham; for them there is only one "City". In the same way, there is only one city that matters in the Bible narrative, and that is Jerusalem. From its capture by David onwards, it is the setting, or at least the focus, of

most of Bible history. A whole book of the Bible—Lamentations—is occupied by a prophet's grief over its condition, and there is a certain inevitability in the fact that, when we reach the visionary ending of earthly history, there is again a city in the picture, and its name is Jerusalem.

From a purely geographical point of view it must always remain a mystery why God, with a whole creation at His disposal, chose to tie down His central revelation of Himself to such a localised setting. We can only assume that there is more here than mere topographical predilection (to use a phrase of John Betjeman's), and try to find out what it is.

THE IMPORTANCE OF JERUSALEM

The importance of Jerusalem in Old Testament times stemmed from two main factors. One was simply that David, evidently impressed by its strategic situation and its strength as a fortress, selected it as his political capital. The other, and far greater, factor was that God chose it as the place where He was to be worshipped. Long before the city became theirs, God had told Israel that, although the peoples they would encounter in Canaan had the habit of worshipping their gods on any convenient "high place", *His* people were not to do this. He would choose one place, and the place "which the Lord your God shall choose to cause his name to dwell there, thither shall ye bring all that I command you" (Deuteronomy 12. 11). To the place He chose, all the male members of the nation were to come, three times in the year, to celebrate the great religious feasts.

In due course, God's choice was made clear; it was Jerusalem. At the dedication of the Temple, Solomon exclaimed, "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel,

which spake with his mouth unto David my father, saying . . . I have chosen Jerusalem, that my name might be there" (II Chronicles 6. 4-6). Jerusalem was to be the centre, not merely of the political but also of the spiritual, life of the nation. It became the goal of the thrice-yearly trek, which was, henceforth, to be an integral part of Israel's national life, and which probably gave us the Songs of Ascent (Psalms 120-134): "Jerusalem . . . whither the tribes go up."

The effect of these two functions, the political and the spiritual, was to bind Israel as a unit firmly to Jerusalem. This is obvious from the action which Jeroboam took, after he had led away the ten northern tribes of Israel in revolt against Rehoboam and the house of David. He not only set up a separate Israelite kingdom, but quickly provided alternative places of worship in Bethel and Dan, to cut out the annual visits to Jerusalem for, as he accurately observed: "If this people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam" (I Kings 12. 27). But whether Jeroboam liked it or not, centralisation at Jerusalem was what God had intended.

THE ANNUAL FESTIVALS AT JERUSALEM

Why had God done this? Let us seek an answer to this question by trying to imagine the scene at one of the three great annual festivals at Jerusalem. To this scene, the hundred-and-twenty-second Psalm offers a most suitable guide. When Israel gathered for the feast there would be present at Jerusalem, firstly, the king in his royal state: "For there are set thrones of judgement, the thrones of the house of David" (Psalm 122. 5); secondly, the Temple with its priesthood and sacrifices: "the house of the Lord" (verse 1); thirdly, the whole

people of God, represented by their men: "... the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, . . . to give thanks unto the name of the Lord" (verse 4).

Here, then, was concentrated in one place the essence of those three things which, from the very beginning, had been necessary for the vindication and satisfaction of God—authority, represented by God's king dispensing judgement; contact and confidence, represented by the House and its way of access to God; and the great company of "brethren dwelling together in unity" (cf. Psalm 133. 1) which would speak of human differences eliminated, and of God and man joined in a new, joyful relationship. All the evidence needed to vindicate God in His creation was gathered together in this one place; everything He most desired was symbolised here. It is of this place that the psalmist speaks when he says, "Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined."

The visit of the Queen of Sheba to the court of Solomon enables us to judge the effect which this scene at Jerusalem was intended to produce. When she saw it, she was "in ecstasy" (I Kings 10. 5, Septuagint). She admired everything—the wisdom of the king, who exercised judgement with justice; the orderliness of his people under his rule; the obvious contentment of the nation, and the splendour of the Temple which Solomon had built. God was here presenting, in one dramatic scene, all the evidence of His "manifold wisdom". There was, as the psalmist reminds us, no scene more impressive to the world than this, or any so dear to the eye of God: "Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, the city of the great king . . . For, lo, the kings were assembled, they passed by together. They saw it, and so they marvelled; they were troubled, and hasted away. Fear took hold upon them there" (Psalm 48. 2-6).

THE FADING GLORY

But the passage of the years swiftly revealed a tragic weakness—the inhabitants of the city were failing to live up to their role. Within a few years of the Queen of Sheba's visit, Jerusalem was the capital not of a nation, but of a rump state comprising only two-twelfths of the land of Israel. A few more years passed by, and the gold of Solomon's Temple had been replaced by brass (II Chronicles 12. 10), and even the brass was kept under lock and key except when the king himself entered the House. The gold had become dim and the fine gold was changed (Lamentations 4. 1). Moreover, the wisdom of God was no longer to be heard here—that wisdom which had drawn so many to Jerusalem when Solomon first came to the throne. It had been discarded, promptly and catastrophically, by his successor, and now this, which had been perhaps the crowning glory of God's city, had been lost with all the rest (II Chronicles 10. 6–8). The oracle was silent.

As time went by, the annual festivals, also, lost their splendour, for they were more and more sparsely attended. Not only were the ten northern tribes diverted away from Jerusalem, to worship elsewhere, but even the people of the southern kingdom did not attend. They grew tired of the yearly journeys, and decided that it would be simpler to stay at home. There, if they bothered to worship at all, they made use of the nearest "high places". So, at the festivals, there were many absentees, and even those who attended—the kings and priests and a remnant of the people—had grown careless about God's unalterable rule of holiness. The House of God in Jerusalem had lost both its material splendour and its cloud of glory.

The great days of Jerusalem were over, their passing unforgettably portrayed for us by the Lamentations of

Jeremiah. The strength and solidity of the great city, which had formerly served as symbols of security and confidence for God's people, now stood revealed to the perceptive eye as an illusion; indeed, as a source not of strength but of weakness. Life in the wilderness had had this, at least, to commend it, that when the cloud of God's glory lifted and moved away from His House, the people could at once break camp and go after it. They could pack up the tents—their tents and God's Tent—and follow the glory until they were reunited with it, where it came to rest again. But living in a great city, with a magnificent Temple of stone, had the grave disadvantage that when the glory departed, there was nothing that anybody could do about it. The people of Jerusalem were stranded now, with their empty buildings and hollow finery, and as they watched the armies of Assyria or Babylon closing in on the city which had become a death trap, any of them who understood the spiritual realities must have longed for the wilderness again and the pilgrim days.

Year by year the great spectacle, which God had devised as an expression of His perfect wisdom, had been losing something of its splendour, and at last nothing remained. The city lay in ruins, the Temple was sacked, the people were scattered in captivity, and we have instead the spectacle of Nehemiah, picking his way by night over the rubble that lay where the city walls had once stood. Can it have been some such presentiment, given in a flash of spiritual foresight, that prompted the psalmist's appeal: "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem"?

THE HEAVENLY JERUSALEM

But this tragic story of defeat and humiliation does not end there. As with the Kingdom and the House, so

with the City, there is a New Testament sequel. The glory of Jerusalem is to be restored, in a new and heavenly City, and from that City the glory will never again depart. In the Apocalyptic description of this new Jerusalem, we are carried back in thought to the days of Solomon; and yet there is, in the new, a glory that exceeds even that of the old: "And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and shewed me the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God . . . And the nations shall walk by the light thereof: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory into it . . . and they shall bring the glory and the honour of the nations into it" (Revelation 21. 10, 24, 26). Peace, order, security and livelihood—all that goes to make up the life of a great city—God will, at the last, provide for His people; and then He Himself will come and dwell among them.

So the past and the future are known and secured; the past failure and the future restoration. But what of the present? What is the link between Jerusalem below and Jerusalem above? It is supplied for us by the writer to the Hebrews, when he declares: "But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven" (Hebrews 12. 22-23). As the tribes of Israel once gathered at Sinai; as they later gathered, year by year, at Jerusalem, the earthly "city of the living God", so now we His people are together constituted citizens of His City, for worship, for witness, and to hear the oracle speak, to us as to them.

The writer to the Hebrews carries us along with him as he describes the gathering in this latter-day Jerusalem, and the immense advantages which we possess over Israel of old. Yet suddenly, without warning, we are

jolted into awareness that the tone has changed; we are being given a very solemn lesson in the responsibilities of citizenship: "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven . . . For our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12. 25, 29). The oracle is speaking to us; let us not make the mistake which they made, and refuse to hear.

With this warning, the writer abruptly concludes the substantive part of his epistle. To realise its application to our own lives we must therefore retrace our steps, once again, to the Old Testament scene which we have earlier considered. What was this mistake which they made, and how may we guard against it?

The trouble in Jerusalem lay, as we have seen, in the inhabitants. Just as the Parisians are an essential feature of Paris, or the Cockneys of London, so Jerusalem needed a population that would express its true character. The city in itself was nothing; what counted was the presence there of a people in whose midst God dwelt.

But the people did not realise this. To them, what mattered was the splendour of the buildings and the stoutness of the walls. Not until it was too late did they realise that, in taking all this for granted, they had lost the essential; the glory had departed. And without the glory, this city was no different from any other. Without the glory to shield the city, its wall did not provide the inhabitants with security; it imprisoned them. The city fell because the glory had been withdrawn, and the glory had been withdrawn because, by life and action, by neglect and disobedience, they were refusing Him who was the oracle in their midst.

Here, surely, is the lesson for God's people in our day. What counts in this spiritual City is the glory of

God, and that glory depends, directly and firmly, on the condition of its inhabitants. Citizenship of this City is not something conferred as a kind of ornamental dignity in a single ceremony, like the freedom of a borough; citizenship demands of every citizen a lasting, conscious concern for the welfare of the City, its administration and its defences. It demands our acceptance of *our* responsibility for the state of God's people and so, ultimately, for the continuance among them of the glory of His presence.

So many of us have become imprisoned inside our cities—those fixed positions in which we, or our predecessors, once enjoyed the presence of God. But although we still occupy them, the glory has departed, leaving behind a mere shell, immobile and indefensible. And if we remain there, it is presumably because we think the position more important than the glory—which, if we discard the picture and ponder the spiritual truth, is the same thing as saying that we think more of the position we hold than of the condition of our lives.

For only the condition of our lives could make the glory of God's presence withdraw. He is not trying to elude us, or like some will-o'-the-wisp to lead us astray. On the contrary, He made it clear from the very first that He *wants* to dwell among men. Only if conditions arise which are utterly incompatible with His holiness or His authority will He move away. But these conditions may, nevertheless, arise among His people, and it is of this that we are warned by the writer to the Hebrews, who has been our guide through so much of this study.

The twelfth chapter of Hebrews warns us that, confronted with God's demands for holiness among His people (verse 14) and for obedience to His word, we may make the double mistake of "despising" (or under-

rating) the first and "refusing" the second. The first mistake was Esau's, when he weighed his hunger against the privilege of the birthright, and chose in favour of the food he craved. Since he could see no immediate advantage in possession of the birthright, he despised it (Genesis 25. 34), and that is the same word that the writer to the Hebrews uses in speaking of the arduous, seemingly pointless discipline to which God subjects His own: "My son, *despise* not thou the chastening of the Lord . . . Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (Hebrews 12. 5, 11). The mistake we make is to exaggerate the importance of our own privilege in being His people, and to underrate, by contrast, the importance of His purpose to make us "partakers of his holiness" (verse 10). Surely that summarises in a single sentence the failure both of the old Jerusalem and of the Church today.

The second mistake, as we have already seen, is to "refuse" the word of God, as Israel did, at Sinai—and again, repeatedly, in after years. Fatal as we know this to be, the effect of such a refusal does not always become apparent at once; there may be an appearance of prosperity and even of progress. But this twelfth chapter reminds us, as it closes, that there will come a time of shaking and testing, and then the true strength of our position will be revealed. Then, indeed, it will be seen whether the glory has departed, leaving our city defenceless, or whether His very presence is our covering and our glory. "Wherefore . . . let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. . . ."

So the practical implications of all that has gone before are drawn together in this one responsibility—the responsibility of worthy citizenship. It is an image

that reminds us that what matters, in the last analysis, is *evidence* (for a city set on a hill cannot be hidden) and that the evidence is provided by the life of God's people *together*. And it reminds us, too, that while He needs us for His vindication and pleasure, we, in our turn, need Him; for all that is marvellous in this City is His alone, and without Him the new Jerusalem itself would be dark as night, because He is all its light and glory.

Behold! the mountain of the Lord
in latter days shall rise
On mountain tops above the hills,
and draw the wond'ring eyes.

To this the joyful nations round,
all tribes and tongues shall flow;
Up to the hill of God, they'll say,
and to his house we'll go.

The beam that shines from Sion hill
shall lighten every land;
The king who reigns in Salem's towers
shall all the world command.

Among the nations he shall judge;
his judgements truth shall guide;
His sceptre shall protect the just,
and quell the sinner's pride.

* * *

Come then, O house of Jacob! come
to worship at his shrine;
And, walking in the light of God,
with holy beauties shine.

*Old Scottish Paraphrase,
Isaiah 2. 2-6.*

POSTSCRIPT

THE PURPOSE: FRUSTRATION OR FULFILMENT?

IF the tragedy-laden history of mankind has been no more than a process whereby God was slowly returning to His starting point in creation, has it all been worthwhile? Is all the suffering and sorrow of the human race in its sin—not to speak of the divine suffering of the Cross—really justified if all it has done is to give God the opportunity to clear the slur on His reputation, and to renew old contacts? In his tortured but wonderful poem *Gethsemane*, Alun Lewis put the question in this form, during the dark days of the world war:

“ . . . Can such a torment of refining
Be aimless wholly, undesigning?

Must
Such aching
Go to making
Dust?”

Whispered the wind in the olive tree
In the Garden of Gethsemane.

Has there been *no* progress? It is a question which demands an answer. A man who sets out for a distant destination, but through misdirection loses his way, will not be content merely to regain the right road, or even to get his own back on the guide who misled him; he will want to arrive.

What is God's destination? We can never expect fully to understand the thoughts of God, for they are higher

than our thoughts. But so far as we can dimly see, He created the universe, and man in it, as a means of giving expression to Himself. Man was the zenith of that creation, not only as the supreme evidence of God's capacity to express Himself creatively, but also as the creature with whom, uniquely, God intended to share a divinely personal relationship. He was a creature in the Creator's own image. But that first creation was marred, and in Christ He gloriously made good the damage, by introducing a *new* creation and a new man. We may say, then, that the acid test is here: does this new man represent any advance upon the old? Does the pinnacle of the new creation transcend the pinnacle of the old?

The first man was an expression of God's greatness, of His power to create and His wisdom and skill. But that, really, was all. Whatever other divine attributes God might seek to display, they were as yet concealed by the absence of any conditions that could bring them into view. The revelation of God which this first man presented was a limited one, the impression of His greatness restricted by the lack of other forces at work.

What of the new man in Christ? What do we learn of God from him? Did his creation represent a greater or lesser feat than that of his predecessor? Here, surely, is the great advance that the years have brought, for, whereas the first man displayed God's power alone, the new man expresses, by his very existence, divine qualities undreamed of in Eden.

This new man is a product of God's patience; of God's mercy; supremely, of His love in Christ. In the circumstances of man's rebellion, God has found a way of revealing Himself to the full. He is seen now to possess—indeed, to have possessed all along—not only power to create, but also love to redeem—and then more power and more love, sufficient at last to make His

creatures love Him in return. We love Him because He first loved us . . .

* * *

. . . and gave Himself for us. A rough cross beneath a darkened sky; a lonely figure hanging between two condemned men; a solitary voice raised above the jeers and the mourning and the indifferent chatter: who would see in these the symbols and sounds of destiny? who understand their meaning? By what mysterious, divine alchemy could God so fashion these materials as to make of them the pivot of all His plans?

These were the emblems of the greatness of Christ—of a servant's humility and a son's obedience; of human perfection and divine love. These were the materials, provided by the Son and transformed by the Father into the swift, shattering victory of Calvary, the victory that ushered in a new world.

So much we see, by the Spirit's help, and shall one day see more, when the new and ultimate emblems of His greatness are revealed—the crown and the sceptre, the shout of victory and the song of worship—and we shall recognise that He alone is worthy, for to His greatness we owe it all.

O, the joy to see Thee reigning,
Thee, my own beloved Lord!
Every tongue Thy name confessing,
Worship, honour, glory, blessing,
Brought to Thee with one accord;
Thee, my Master and my Friend,
Vindicated and enthroned,
Unto earth's remotest end
Glorified, adored and owned.